

THE BEAST OF REVELATION 17—A SUGGESTION
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Rev 17 is one of the most complicated chapters of the NT and has received many different interpretations. In this article we will focus on the beast on which the harlot Babylon rides and will try to identify it. The beast is briefly introduced in Rev 17:3. In Rev 17:7-8 an enigmatic description follows: “And the angel said to me, ‘Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and goes [literal translation] to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that it was and is not and will come.’” Further information on the beast is given in the rest of Rev 17.

This article will not solve all the riddles, but it attempts to contribute to the debate. It seems that one way or the other there always remain some open ends. We will try to limit them to a minimum.

I. The Issues and Their Discussion

Reading Rev 17 in the context of the Book of Revelation triggers a number of important questions that beg an answer: (1) Is the sea beast of Rev 13 identical with the beast of Rev 17 or does the beast of Rev 17 represent a different power? Do we, for instance, find the deadly wound of Rev 13:3,14 in one or another form again in Rev 17? (2) What is the time frame of the events portrayed in Rev 17? Does John describe final events from a first century A.D. perspective or is the point of reference to be found later and John is placed there in the spirit? (3) Are the descriptions of the beast in Rev 17:8—namely “it was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and goes to destruction”—parallel to the description of the heads which are depicted as “five are fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” plus the eighth (Rev 17:9-11), or do these different stages of the beast not directly coincide with the subdivision of the heads?¹ (4) How should the heads be interpreted?

Preterist interpreters of Revelation see in the harlot, the beast, and the seven mountains of Rev

¹The “was” phase of the beast would be parallel to “five are fallen;” the “is not” phase of the beast would parallel “one is” of the heads; and the “will come” phase of the beast would match “the other one has not yet come.”

17:9, which are the seven heads of the beast, a reference to Rome.² Some of them understand the seven heads as seven emperors of the first century A.D.³ Since there is hardly a way to decide which of the more than ten Roman emperors of the first century are meant,⁴ other scholars suggest a symbolic approach. Mounce holds: “The most satisfactory explanation of the seven kings is that the number seven is symbolic and stands for the power of the Roman Empire as a historic whole.”⁵ Corsini understands the beast of Rev 17 as oscillating between the dragon of Rev 12 and the sea beast of Rev 13. Primarily it represents Satan. “. . . the symbol of the seven heads is probably an indication of the dominion exercised by the totality (seven) of evil spirits in the human and physical sphere.”⁶ When it comes to the horns, Prigent suggests that they represent future kings of the entire earth. He rejects the interpretation that they are to be seen as Parthian satraps.⁷

Kistemaker is not completely satisfied with the preterist approach. Talking about the harlot

²E.g., for Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 487, the “woman who rides it [the beast] is Rome, the imperial city. The beast is a symbol of the Roman empire and an allusion to Nero” (491). Cf. Ronald L. Farmer, *Revelation*, Chalice Commentaries for Today (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 144; and Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 171, on the heads.

³E.g., R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John Vol. 2*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 69; Harrington, 172; Prigent, 492.

⁴For a discussion of the problems involved see, David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 946-948; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 872-874; Farmer, 114-116; Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2001), 471-472; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 315-317; and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 617-619.

⁵Mounce, 317; cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 948. While Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, The New Testament in Context (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 361, argues for a symbolic understanding of the number seven, he still identifies the sixth head with Domitian.

⁶Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983) 325. See also pages 322-324. Kistemaker, 469, when trying to identify the beast of Rev 17 seems also to vacillate between the beast of Rev 13a and Satan. Jon Paulien, “Revelation 17 and the Papacy” in *Endtime Issues Newsletter No. 131*: 27 at www.biblicalperspectives.com, suggests that the dragon of Rev 12, the sea beast of Rev 13, and the beast of Rev 17 form different stages of the same beast.

⁷Prigent, 494.

Babylon first he states that “identifying Babylon with Rome as the great prostitute is by itself restrictive and time-bound. . . . This scene, therefore, speaks not merely of the overthrow of the Roman empire but rather of the complete and lasting defeat of the entire anti-Christian world.”⁸ For him the beast is “the Antichrist, who receives authority from Satan . . .,” and the heads are empires representing “ancient Babylonia (Gen 10:8-12), Assyria, Neo-Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greco-Macedonia; Rome is number six, as the one that *is* during John’s lifetime. And then there is another, the seventh one, that has not yet come.”⁹

A futuristic approach is taken by Walvoord who seems to follow Seiss in understanding the five heads that are fallen as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece and the one that is as Rome. “The final form of world government, symbolized by the eighth beast itself, is the world empire of the great tribulation time. The revived Roman Empire which will be in sway immediately after the rapture of the church is apparently indicated by the seventh head . . .”¹⁰ Thomas follows Walvoord and basically accepts the just mentioned identification of the seven heads. According to him the seventh head is the future kingdom of the beast. He comes “to the conclusion that the perspective of this description of the beast is entirely future, at a point just before the beast of the sea begins his three and a half year reign.”¹¹ Obviously both work with the secret rapture¹² based on the gap theory, which separates the 70th week of Dan 9 from the 69 weeks of the 70-week time span, place it in the future, and find references to half of the 70th last week in Revelation.

Wall may favor an idealist approach maintaining that “Whether or not this vision predicts Rome’s fall is unimportant; its critical purpose is to transmit timeless truth about the structures and ruling elite of the social order in any age.”¹³

⁸Kistemaker, 460.

⁹Ibid, 469, 472.

¹⁰John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 254.

¹¹Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1995), 293, 297.

¹²Ibid., 366.

¹³Robert. Wall, *Revelation.*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 202. On pages 207-208 he continues: “Any historical construction of John’s comment is fraught with enormous difficulty; and he has consistently employed **seven** as a symbol of totality or completion.”

Like the preterists historicists oftentimes link the beast of Rev 17 with the sea beast of Rev 13.¹⁴ While preterists interpret the beasts of Rev 13 and 17 as the Roman empire, historicists understand them primarily as the Roman church, that is, ecclesiastical Rome through the centuries until today. Some of them hold that the “was” phase of the beast in Rev 17 represents pagan Rome, the “is not” phase the interim between pagan and papal Rome, and the “will come” phase papal Rome.¹⁵ “Others equate the ‘was’ period with that represented by the beast and its seven heads, the ‘is not’ period with the interval between the wounding of the seventh head and the revival of the beast (Rev 13:3) as ‘the eighth’, and the ‘yet is’ [‘will come’] period with the revival of the beast when it becomes ‘the eighth.’”¹⁶ In this case the “was” period would probably stand for papal Rome and the “will come” phase for its revival after the healing of the deadly wound. Both interpretations would somehow associate the beast with Rome. Reynolds taking a different approach argues that the beast of Rev 17 represents Satan.¹⁷

When it comes to the seven heads historicists tend to agree that they represent empires rather than individual kings. However, different starting points are being used. One suggestion is to interpret the five heads as the beasts of Daniel 7 plus the little horn power, that is, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, the Roman empire, and the Roman church. However, with regard to the sixth and seventh heads opinions vary. Some understand the sixth head as the beast out of the abyss in Rev 11, that is, the French Revolution, while others see it as the beast out of the earth (Rev 13), namely the United States of America. The seventh head could then be a world organization or restored Papacy.¹⁸ In a similar vein, Maxwell and Doukhan suggest that the heads are Babylon, Persia, Greece, pagan Rome,

¹⁴Cf. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 402-403, 404, 404. Although Stefanovic may not be a historicist in the strictest sense of the word, among others he also uses the historicist approach to the interpretation of the Apocalypse (12).

¹⁵Cf. Francis D. Nichol (ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 7 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1957), 853.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Edwin Reynolds, “The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 103.

¹⁸Cf. Nichol, 7:854-855.

Christian Rome, wounded Christian Rome, and revived Christian Rome/the reinstated church.¹⁹ Such an approach, that is, starting with Babylon does hardly allow for the sixth head to be placed in John's time, namely the first century A.D. It links one phase of the beast of Rev 17 and the sixth head of this same beast with the deadly wound of the head and beast of Rev 13²⁰ and places the affliction of the wound in the year 1798 A.D.

Another proposal put forth, for instance, by Strand, Stefanovic, and Paulien considers the five heads that are fallen as the world empires Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, the sixth head as pagan Rome and the seventh as papal Rome.²¹ This approach locates the sixth head in the first century A.D. Reynolds agrees with the first five empires but differs with regard to the last two. He suggests understanding the sixth head as Rome in both pagan and papal form. The seventh head would then be the beast coming out of the earth (Rev 13b).²²

According to Doukhan "the 10 kings represent the last political world powers. Having already encountered them in Rev 16 in the context of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12), we shall meet them again in chapter 18 in which they fight the last battle of Armageddon (Rev. 18:9)."²³

II. Context and Time Frame of Revelation 17

Rev 15 contains an introduction to the seven last plagues. They are executed in chapter 16. With them the wrath of God is completed (Rev 15:1). The plagues form a climax when compared to the other numbered series of seven of the apocalyptic part of the book—the seals and the trumpets--, because instead of a fourth (Rev 6:8; fourth seal) and a third (8:7-12; 9:15,18; trumpets) of humanity

¹⁹Cf. C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation For You and Your Family, Vol 2* (Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985), 471-475; and Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 161-163.

²⁰Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 438, rejects this position: "The view that the healing of the beast's mortal wound in chapter 13 is the same event as the beast's reemergence from the abyss in chapter 17 has, in any case, grave difficulties of its own."

²¹Cf. Nichol, 7:854-856; Kenneth A. Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?" in *Symposium on Revelation-Book 2. Daniel and Revelation Committee Series Vol. 7*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 191; Stefanovic, 512; Paulien, 37; Nichol, 7:854-856.

²²Cf. Reynolds, 104-106.

²³Cf. Doukhan, 164. For further discussions on the horns see IV.3. in this article.

or elements of nature being affected the plagues seem to have a universal scope. The sixth plague describes the drying up of the Euphrates river, the river of Babylon, the coming of the kings from the east, which may point to Jesus and his heavenly host,²⁴ and Armageddon. The seventh plague depicts the judgment on Babylon and the time when it is being divided into three parts.

From Rev 17 onward this judgment is described in more detail. The connection of the plagues with the subsequent chapters is evident. In Rev 17:1 one of the seven bowl angels introduces John to the judgment on harlot Babylon which is described in chapters 17-19. In chapter 17 Babylon is primarily seen as a harlot and in chapter 18 as a city. The coming of the rider on the white horse with his heavenly army in Rev 19 ends with the sea beast and the false prophet being cast in the lake of fire and the others being killed with the sword. The judgment on Satan and apostate humanity follows in Rev 20. Again one of the bowl angels appears. In a more detailed manner he introduces to John the bride of the lamb (Rev 21:9-22:6), the New Jerusalem mentioned already in Rev 19 and further explained in Rev 21 and 22. The two women figures, harlot and bride, are juxtaposed, and humans must choose to which of the two women they want to belong.²⁵

This short survey indirectly points out that starting with Rev 15 the visions of the Apocalypse appear “to be purely eschatological in nature,” although they contain historical flashbacks, while the first part of Revelation covers events which “take place in historical time, since they pertain to the historical future and culminate with eschatological events associated with the Parousia.”²⁶

Rev 17:3,8-12 must be interpreted in this end-time context of judgment. It is from the

²⁴The text seems to reflect on the fall of ancient Babylon, the “drying up” of the Euphrates river through Cyrus--according to tradition--who as a Persian had come from the east and was called God’s anointed one (messiah–Isa 45:1), and the deliverance of God’s people (Isa 44:28; Ezra 1:1-8). It seems to reapply this fall of ancient Babylon in a typological way to end time Babylon and its destruction through the Messiah Jesus Christ. That it is best to see Jesus and his heavenly army in the kings from the east is suggested within the same description of the plague, namely the coming of Jesus in Rev 16:15. This is further substantiated in Rev 17 where Jesus wins the war against demonic powers and in Rev 19 where he is described as rider on the white horse followed by the armies of heaven waging successfully war against evil powers, a closer description of Armageddon. According to Matt 24:27 the coming of Jesus is compared to a lightning flashing from east to west. Cf. Nichol, 7:844.

²⁵Cf. the list of similarities and yet differences provided by Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 131-132.

²⁶Reynolds, 93-94; cf. Kenneth A. Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions,” in *Symposium on Revelation-Book 1*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series Vol. 6, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 35, 48-49.

perspective of the judgment on Babylon, the judgment under the sixth and seventh plague which points to the final destruction of Babylon in connection with Christ's second coming, that the events in Rev 17 must be understood.

Before we venture into a detailed discussion of the beast on which Babylon sits, the question should be raised, Who is Babylon? Rev 12-14 introduces the satanic trinity: the dragon, the sea beast, and the beast from the earth. In the same vision suddenly Babylon is mentioned without further explanation or definition. It occurs in the second angel's message (Rev 14:8), whereas the third angel's message returns to the sea beast and the beast from the earth (Rev 14:9-11). This arrangement suggests that a connection exists between the satanic trinity and Babylon. Obviously, John intended to communicate to his audience that end time Babylon is a combination of the evil powers portrayed in Rev 12-13, the dragon and the two other beasts.²⁷ A relation between the satanic trinity and Babylon is also found in the plagues. In the sixth plague the Euphrates river, the river of Babylon, is juxtaposed with the satanic trinity (Rev 16:12-13). Under the seventh plague Babylon seems to disintegrate into her three original parts (Rev 16:19).

III. The Structure of Revelation 17

Although this study is interested in the beast of Rev 17 and mentions the harlot Babylon in passing only, it is necessary to look at the entire chapter. Rev 17 can be outlined in the following way:²⁸

²⁷Cf. Angel Manuel Rodríguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 132-133; Stefanovic, 448, 497. Adventists have associated the dragon with demonic-spiritualistic elements or paganism, the Papacy, and apostate Protestantism. Cf. Don F. Neufeld (ed.), *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second revised edition, two volumes (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 1:148-150.

²⁸For a syntactical diagram of Rev 17 see Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11*. Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, Volume 21 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1996), 621-624.

The Structure of Rev 17

1. Narrative: John is approached by one of the bowl angels (1a)
Angelic Speech 1 (1b-2): (He said:) *Judgment on the harlot*
2. Narrative: John is taken into the desert (3a)
Vision 1 (3b-5): (I saw:) *The harlot on the beast with seven heads and ten horns as the mother of harlots, Babylon the Great*
Vision 2 (6a): (I saw:) *The harlot and the saints*
3. Narrative: John wonders (6b)
Angelic Speech 2 (7-14): (He said:) *The beast, the heads, the horns and the future battle against the lamb, the faithful ones*
Angelic Speech 3 (15-18): (He said:) *The waters, the horns' and the beast's battle against the harlot, the harlot as the great city*

In apocalyptic literature such as the Book of Daniel a vision is often followed by an explanation.²⁹ After an initial angelic speech in the beginning of Rev 17 we find two short visions followed by two longer speeches separated by short pieces of narrative.³⁰ The distinction between visions and angelic speeches is important. In a vision a prophet may move freely in time and location.³¹ He may be in the future, which he may observe as if it were the present. The interpretation of a vision, however, has to relate to the prophet's time and place in order to make sense to human beings and allow them to know in which time to locate the predicted events.

In his first speech the angel promises John that the judgment on the harlot will be shown to him. However, the next two short visions (Rev 17:3b-5 and Rev 17:6a) do not spell out this judgment but furnish additional information on the harlot and her activities and mention the beast with seven heads and ten horns. The following two angelic speeches do not only explain most powers mentioned before--with the exception of the beast--, but also elaborate on the judgment referred to in the first angelic speech. They portray the beast and the horns in their final battle against the lamb and in their battle against the harlot, which is her judgment. Thus, they provide additional information not

²⁹Cf. Dan 7:1-15 and 7:16-28 or Rev 1:16 and 1:20.

³⁰Cf. Walvoord, 243.

³¹See Rev 4:1 where John enters heaven.

contained in any of the two visions. Therefore, these angelic speeches are not just an explanation of the visions but furnish new insights.

The first vision stresses the harlot as “Babylon the Great,” whereas the last speech calls her “the great city” preparing for Rev 18 in which the destruction of the great city will be shown. The universal influence of Babylon (Rev 17:1,15), the dependence of the kings (Rev 17:2,18; 18:3,9-10), the merchants (Rev 18:3,11-15), and the seafarers (Rev 18:17-19) on her, her royal claims (Rev 18:7; 17:18) as well as her tremendous wealth and luxury (Rev 17:4; 18:3,7,9,15,17,19) indeed justify it to call her the great or the strong city. In the second vision persecution of the saints is implied, because the harlot is drunk with their blood. In the second speech these believers triumph with the Lamb. A judgment on the beast is indicated in the second angelic speech (17:8,11). It has not been mentioned in the first speech which referred to the judgment of the harlot only. However, in the case of the beast details about its judgment—apart from the reference to its destruction—are not mentioned. They may be reserved for later in the book of Revelation. Nevertheless, all angelic speeches of Rev 17 deal with judgment. While the vision scenes refer to events prior to the judgment of the harlot, the speeches inform John and his audience that at one point in the future the allies of the harlot will turn against her and destroy her.

With regard to these final activities we find a stronger emphasis on the horns and the beast than on the heads (Rev 17b). The heads are not directly mentioned for being involved in the final battle. This may indicate that the heads are more related to the flow of history, whereas the horns in conjunction with the beast play an important role in the decisive battle against Jesus and in the battle against the harlot (Rev 17:12-14,16-17). This is also evident when one looks at the use of tenses and the description of the appearance of the horns. A number of verbs employing the future tense describe future activities of the horns. These horns will come to power in the future only, collaborating with the beast “for one hour.”³²

³²Verse 12 states that the horns, which are kings, have not yet received a kingdom, but “receive” power as kings with the beast for one hour. Although “to receive” (*lambanousin*) is used in the present tense it points to the future. It is translated with the future tense or the construction “are to” by the The Douay-Rheims American Edition (DRA), the ESV, The Geneva Bible (GNV), NIV, NJB, NSRV, and others. A similar construction with *houpō* in Rev 17:10 requires also a future meaning. In verse 13 present tenses are used again. However, the context requires again a future meaning. Verse 14 employs future tenses, one in connection with the horns. In verse 15 four verbs in the indicative future describe the actions of the horns.

The following outline focuses on speeches 2 and 3 in a more detailed way.

The Second and the Third Angelic Speeches

Second Speech of the Angel (7-14):

Introduction (7)

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|---|
| a. | The beast (8-9a) | |
| | <i>Which you have seen</i> | - |
| b. | The heads (9b-11) | |
| | - | The heads are seven mountains and seven kings. |
| c. | The horns (12-14) | |
| | <i>Which you have seen</i> | The horns are ten kings. |

Third Speech of the angel (15-18):

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|
| a. | The waters (15) | |
| | <i>Which you have seen</i> | The waters are peoples, multitudes, etc. |
| b. | The ten horns and the beast (16-17) | |
| | <i>Which you have seen</i> | - |
| c. | The harlot (18) | |
| | <i>Which you have seen</i> | The harlot is the great city. |

The second angelic speech contains (1) information on the beast, (2) identification of the heads plus further information on them, and (3) identification of the horns plus further information on them with a strong emphasis on future activities. The third angelic speech comprises (1) an identification of the waters, (2) information on future activities of the horns and the beast, and (3) an identification of the harlot.

That means that the harlot, the waters, the heads, and the horns are identified. In each case the same phrase is used.³³ The only entity which is not directly identified is the beast (Rev 17:8-9a). There is another section in the third angelic speech dealing with beast and horns, in which identification is missing (Rev 17:16-17). But the horns have already been explained previously. Therefore, it is again the beast which is not identified with another symbol or with a literal power.³⁴

³³This is the phrase “The heads/horns/waters/harlot *are/is* . . .”

³⁴While the beast is singled out as the symbol which is not unlocked, the heads are singled out in another way. The second speech deals with the beast, the heads, and the horns; the third with the waters, the horns and the beast, and the harlot/woman. In these six sections five times the phrase “which you have seen” is applied. It is found with all entities except the heads. The lack of the formula “which you have seen” is to a certain extent made up by a double

Although we hear about its activities or phases, beyond that the beast is not further explained. This fact may be important for the understanding of the beast. Whereas the judgment on the harlot is described in great detail in Rev 17-19, a detailed description of the judgment on the beast is not found in Rev 17.

IV. Interpretation of the Beast of Rev 17 Including Its Heads and Horns

One of the major problems, which expositors of Revelation encounter, is that the harlot and the beast seem to point to the same historical entity. Whether interpreted as the Roman empire or papal Rome students of the Apocalypse notice that the harlot Babylon may somehow be related to Rome, but so may also be the beast on which she sits. In addition, sometimes even one or more of the heads are identified with Rome.³⁵ Since at the end of chapter 17 this very same beast and its horns kill the prostitute, the paradoxical situation arises that Rome seems to bring about the downfall of Rome, that is, Rome kills herself. This may not be very likely, because the text does not indicate suicidal thoughts or behavior on part of the beast, the prostitute, or the heads. On the contrary, each entity seems to be vigorous and active pursuing their goals once set.

Corsini having observed this problem writes: “It is important to ease this confusion [namely the identification that the woman and the beast upon which she sits represent one thing] by distinguishing between the woman and the beast, even if they are united in a monstrous intimacy.”³⁶ To suggest, for instance, that the political power of the Papacy will make war against the spiritual power of the Papacy may strain the passage unnecessarily.³⁷

1. The Beast Out of the Abyss

a. A Parody of God

The description of the beast in Rev 17:8b as “was, and is not, and will come” reminds us of

characterization of the heads. The seven heads are seven mountains. They also are seven kings.

³⁵See the discussions on the different interpretations above.

³⁶Corsini, 322.

³⁷Cf. Nichol, 7:851.

God the Father, who is called “He who was and who is and who is to come” (Rev 4:8, cf. 1:4,8).³⁸ It portrays the beast of Rev 17 as a counterfeit, parody, and opponent of God.³⁹ Although God the Father and Jesus Christ share a number of titles in the Apocalypse such as Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), Lord (Rev 1:8; 11:8), and King (Rev 15:3; 17:14), the name “He who was and who is and who is to come” is applied to God the Father only. While the beast of Rev 17 imitates God the Father, the sea beast of Rev 13 is an imitation of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

The phases of the beast resemble closely the three elements in the title of God, although only the segment “he was” is completely identical on the literary level (Rev 17:11). Obviously the beast attempts to replace God. “The beast strives to be like God. . . .”⁴¹ Yet it is not able to achieve its goal. That the imitation of God does not work becomes obvious with the second element, when the word “not” is added to the beast’s existence. The beast “is not.” While God does not experience any time or state in which he does not exist, the beast will experience nonexistence.

In order to clearly see the differences between the beast and God, the beast is not only described with three elements (Rev 17:8b), but is actually introduced with four (Rev 17:8a) and later depicted with five which, however, point to four phases (Rev 17:11). The fourth phase is the complete destruction of the beast. Although the beast may in some respect resemble God, the great difference between God Almighty and the beast becomes evident when it forever disappears from the

³⁸A shortened form is found in Rev 11:17 and 16:5. In these texts the last element, the one talking about his coming, is missing. A reason may be that at the time, to which the text refers to, God will have come to live with redeemed humanity or that his coming is imminent.

³⁹Cf. Beale, 435-436; Farmer, 114; Mounce, 314.

⁴⁰The sea beast of Rev 13 is a parody of the Lamb, Jesus. (1) The lamb looks as though it had been slaughtered (Rev 5:6,12). One of the heads of the sea beast looks as if it had been slaughtered (Rev 13:3). (2) Jesus has come to life (Rev 2:8; 1:18). The sea beast has come to life (13:14). (3) God the Father granted Jesus authority and participation in his throne (Rev 2:27; 3:21). The dragon gives his throne to the sea beast (Rev 13:2). As there is a close connection between God the Father and Jesus, so the dragon and the sea beast are linked together. (4) Jesus has power and authority (Rev 12:10). The dragon gives his power and authority to the beast (Rev 13:4). (5) Jesus is worshiped by heavenly beings and by the entire creation (Rev 5:9-14). The beast receives worship from those who dwell on earth (Rev 13:4; 12). Cf. Mathias Rissi, *Die Hure Babylon und die Verführung der Heiligen: Eine Studie zur Apokalypse des Johannes*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, siebte Folge, Heft 16 (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1995), 33; and Angel M. Rodriguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Great End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 106.

⁴¹Kistemaker, 469.

stage of history, while God remains forever and ever carrying out his plans. At the end Christ and his followers will triumph.

b. The Beasts and the Dragon in Rev 12, 13, and 17

Another issue is the resemblance of the beasts of Rev 13 and Rev 17 and the similarities between the dragon and this scarlet beast. Common elements between the sea beast and the scarlet beast are the following: (1) Both have seven heads and ten horns (Rev 13:1; 17:7). (2) The sea beast has a “mouth speaking . . . blasphemies” (Rev 13:5; cf. verses 1 and 6), while the other beast is “full of blasphemous names” (Rev 17:3). (3) Both are powers opposed to God/Jesus and the followers of Christ (Rev 13:6-8; 17:14). (4) Both are called “beasts.” (5) With both people are wondering (13:3; 17:7). However, while “the whole earth” was amazed about the sea beast, it was John who was wondering about the scarlet beast. The additional similarity produced through the word *hōde* is weak, because the usage in Rev 17:9 differs from the phrase *hōde estin* in Rev 13:10,18 and 14:12.⁴²

Although they share these some common elements, there are also differences: (1) The sea beast has crowns on its horns (Rev 13:1), the beast of Rev 17 has no crowns.⁴³ (2) The color of the sea beast is not mentioned, but the other beast’s color is scarlet (Rev 17:3). (3) The sea beast comes out of the sea (Rev 13:1), but the beast, on which Babylon rides, comes out of the abyss (Rev 17:8), which is not necessarily the same location. (4) Time elements are mentioned with both beasts. However, they differ substantially.⁴⁴ (5) The sea beast receives its power from the dragon and is therefore dependant on the dragon. No such thing is said about the scarlet beast. (6) The sea beast is an imitation of Christ, while the scarlet beast is a parody of God the Father.⁴⁵ This suggests that

⁴²In addition Rev 13:18 is closer to Rev 17:9 than 13:10 is, because it contains both *ōde* and *sophia*.

⁴³The dragon has crowns on his heads. The shifting of the crowns from the heads to the horns and the disappearance of the crowns with the scarlet beast may point to progress in time without necessarily implying that the different entities are the same power. Cf. Kenneth A. Strand, “The Seven Heads,” 183-184.

⁴⁴The same is true for the dragon and the scarlet beast. This may be due to the fact that with the dragon and the sea beast historical time is implied, while the major activity of the scarlet beast in Rev 17 is linked to an end time scenario. We accept the year-day principle for the prophetic time spans in Rev 12 and 13. Cf. Gerhard Pfandl, “The Year-Day Principle,” *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter* April (2007): 1-3.

⁴⁵See the discussion above including footnote 37.

although these beasts share some characteristics and pursue similar goals, they are distinct.

Common elements between the dragon of Rev 12 and the beast of Rev 17 are (1) the seven heads and ten horns (Rev 12:3; 17:7), (2) a similar color (Rev 12:3; 17:3),⁴⁶ (3) opposition specifically to Jesus—the male child and Michael⁴⁷ of Rev 12 and the King of kings in Rev 17—but also to his people (Rev 12:4-17; 17:14), (4) contact to a woman—the pure woman and the harlot—which was/will be harassed and—in the case of the harlot—after an initial alliance be killed. (5) A reference to the desert (Rev 12:6,14; 17:3). The seven heads and the ten horns of the scarlet beast and the dragon share the same order. This is not true for the sea beast (Rev 12:3; 17:3; and 13:1).

Differences between the dragon and the scarlet beast are: (1) While the scarlet beast comes out of the abyss (Rev 17:8), the dragon is somehow related to heaven and is actually cast out of heaven (Rev 12:3,10). However, coming out of the abyss is a later phase of the beast’s career only. Originally, it is just stated that the beast “was.” (2) The dragon has seven crowns on his heads (Rev 12:3); the scarlet beast has no crowns. Crowns on the heads, the horns, or no crowns at all may point to different eras of historical development. (3) The dragon is also called “serpent” (Rev 12:9) but not “beast” (*thērion*) as the scarlet beast is (Rev 17:3).⁴⁸

Paulien suggests: “. . . the dragon of chapter 12, the sea beast of chapter 13, and the scarlet beast of chapter 17 manifest three different stages of one and the same beast.”⁴⁹ However, it seems

⁴⁶Reynolds, 102, states that the difference of color between dragon and beast “is a difference only in hue, not in basic color.” Wall, 206, writes: “. . . the scarlet beast, is linked by its red color to the ‘enormous red dragon’ (12:3), Satan . . .”

⁴⁷Although Michael is called archangel, this does not exclude him from being a divine person. Scripture knows of one archangel only. In the OT the angel of the Lord (Yahweh) is repeatedly identified with the Lord (e.g., Gen 16:7-13; Exod 3:2-6; Judg 6:11-26). In Dan 10:21; 12:1 Michael is the prince of his people Israel. Jesus had declared that the dead would hear the voice of the Son of Man, which is he himself, and would come forth from the graves (John 5:28-29). However, according to 1Thess 4:16 Jesus’ second coming and the resurrection of the dead are associated with the voice of the archangel. “It thus seems clear that Michael is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself . . . The name Michael appears in the Bible only in apocalyptic passages (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7). Moreover, it is used only in instances where Christ is in direct conflict with Satan. The name in Hebrew, signifying ‘who is like God?’ . . . is a most fitting one for Him who has undertaken to vindicate the character of God and disprove Satan’s claims.” Francis D. Nichol, (ed.). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, volume 4 (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 860.

⁴⁸This issue will be discussed later in this article.

⁴⁹Paulien, 27.

that the links between the dragon and the scarlet beast are stronger than those between the sea beast and the beast from the abyss. In addition, it is probable that the differences between the two can be explained more easily than the differences between the sea beast and the scarlet beast. We now turn to the abyss.

c. The Abyss

The beast of Rev 17 comes out of the abyss. In Revelation the abyss is mentioned seven times, five times in two passages (Rev 9:1-2,11; 20:1-3). (1) In Rev 9:1 the star fallen from heaven has the key to the abyss. (2) In Rev 9:2 this star opened the pit of the abyss, “the dwelling place of the locust-demons.”⁵⁰ (3) In Rev 9:11 the king of the locusts is the angel of the abyss called *Apollyon*. (4) In Rev 11:7 the beast which comes out of the abyss kills the two witnesses. (5) According to Rev 17:8 the beast on which the great prostitute sits “was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and goes to destruction.” (6) In Rev 20:1 an angel comes from heaven with the key to the abyss. (7) This angel binds Satan for one thousand years in the abyss--20:3. After this period Satan will be released. The first four references are part of the trumpet vision (Rev 8:2-11:18), the last three belong to the final showdown.

The Hebrew *tēhôm*, rendered as the deep, the waters of the deep or the flood⁵¹ is almost regularly translated with the Greek term *abussos*. This term is found 37 times in the canonical books of the LXX.⁵² For the first time the deep occurs in Gen 1:2 where it describes the situation, when the sea was not yet separated from the dry land. “Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters (*hudatos*).” “‘Over the surface of the deep’ parallels ‘over the waters’ in the subsequent clause. . . . On the second and third days these waters are eventually separated from the expanse and land masses when the waters are called ‘sea’ (vv. 6-

⁵⁰David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 526. Later on the same page he calls these beings “demons” only.

⁵¹Cf. C. Westermann, “תְּהוֹם *tēhôm* flood,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, volume 3, edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 1412-1413.

⁵²However, the reference to the abyss in Dan 3:55 counted with the 37 references is an addition to the MT text.

10).”⁵³ After the separation sea (*thalassa*) and earth (*gē*) became visible. It is precisely from these two areas that the two beasts of Rev 13 came forward, the sea beast and the beast out of the earth.

It is true that in the LXX the abyss is associated with water, the flood, or the sea in the vast majority of the cases and occurs in the singular as well as the plural (e.g., Gen 7:11; Ps 32:7, LXX; Jonah 2:5). However, there are also texts in which the abyss may be contrasted with the sea (Ps 134:6, LXX)⁵⁴ or is described as the “depths of the earth” (Ps 70:20; LXX) from which the Psalmist hopes to be brought up again. Ps 148:7 associates dragons⁵⁵ and all *abussoi*.

When it comes to the NT a shift of meaning occurs. *Abussos* is found nine times in the NT, seven times in Revelation, once in Luke and once in Romans. In Rom 10:7 the abyss is a symbol of the realm of death. According to Luke 8:31 demons ask Jesus not to be sent to the abyss. Thus here the abyss is linked to satanic agencies and is the place where demons may dwell. Westermann has already noted: “Early Judaism and the NT shift the meaning of *tēhôm* and *abyssos* to the depths of the earth as the prison of spirits and as the world of the dead . . .”⁵⁶ Furthermore, in the NT the term is used in the singular only, while in the OT the plural is used in about one third of the cases (eleven times). The sea is not specifically linked to the abyss in the NT or in the Book of Revelation.⁵⁷

⁵³Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 133.

⁵⁴In Ps 135:6 heaven seems to be contrasted with the earth, the sea with the depth, but also the earth with the sea and consequently heaven with the depth. The depth is not necessarily a synonym of the sea.

⁵⁵In Exod 7:10,12 the dragons are serpents, in Ps 73:13-14 (LXX) sea monsters. However, it is not only the abyss that is associated with the dragon, the sea is too (Job 7:12; Eze 32:2).

⁵⁶Westermann, 1414. Cf. J. Jeremias, ἄβυσσός, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 volumes, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 1:9-10.

⁵⁷In Revelation the sea is either associated with God (Rev 4:6; 15:2,2) or mentioned together with the earth (Rev 5:13; 7:1,2,3; 10:2,5,6,8; 12:12; 14:7). It is the place where the fish, the ships, and the sailors are (Rev 8:8,9; 16:3,3; 18:17,19). These are the majority of the usages of the term “sea” in Revelation. The term also occurs in some other contexts. You can throw a stone into the sea (Rev 18:21). The multitudes are like the sand of the sea (Rev 20:8). The sea gave up the dead (Rev 20:13), and the sea will be no longer on the new earth (Rev 21:1). In Rev 12:18 Satan stood at the sea, and in Rev 13:1 the sea beast came out of the sea. The last two reference may refer to the multitudes associated with or represented through the term “sea” (cf. Rev 17:15 where, however, “the waters” are identified with the multitudes). In most of the cases it is difficult or even impossible to read into the term the notion of an abyss. Therefore, we better keep the two terms separate.

Rev 9:1-2

The fallen star (*astēr*) mentioned in Rev 9:1-2, who is able to open the pit of the abyss and bring about disaster, suffering, and torture, has been interpreted as a positive power, e.g., “an angel dispatched on a divine mission”⁵⁸ or the angel mentioned in Rev 20:1,⁵⁹ because it is held (1) that “fallen” can mean “descended,” (2) that “this would be the only place in Revelation where God used an evil angel to execute his will,”⁶⁰ and (3) that there is a close parallel to the positive angel in Rev 20:1-3. It has also been understood as a negative power, predominantly as Satan.⁶¹ In case that the star is seen in a positive way, it is distinguished from the angel of the abyss in verse 11. Those, who understand the fallen star and the angel of the abyss as the same entity, prefer to see the star as an evil power. In spite of these differences there seems to be general agreement that the abyss is the dwelling place, realm, or place of detention of demons,⁶² “the preliminary place of incarceration for fallen angels.”⁶³

A number of OT and NT texts point to the concept of stars and the process of falling or the state of having been fallen and may form the background for this passage. According to Job 38:7 (MT) the “sons of God” are called morning stars. The LXX changes the parallelism to stars and angels. In other words, these stars are angels. Job 1:6 describes how Satan among these sons of God (MT) or angels (LXX) approached God. A fallen morning star occurs in Isa 14:12.⁶⁴ The Babylonian

⁵⁸Thomas, 27; cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 525; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 129; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation, A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 114; Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 225.

⁵⁹Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 108; Osborne, 362. Mounce, 185, is not dogmatic but favors the view that the angel is a divine agent and probably the one found in Rev 20:1.

⁶⁰Osborne, 362.

⁶¹Cf. Beale, 491-492; Kistemaker, 285; Stefanovic, 300, 302; Walvoord, 159.

⁶²Cf. Walvoord, 159; Beale, 493; Osborne, 363.

⁶³Thomas, 28.

⁶⁴The Vulgate has translated the term as *lucifer* from which our designation of Satan derives. Since Jesus is also called the morning star (Rev 22:16), this star is a rival of Christ. Cf. Nichol, 4:170.

king is addressed with language that set him apart “from ordinary mortals,” but according to Watts the poem “is a simile to picture the fall and disgrace of the tyrant” and “is not specifically tailored for the king of Babylon.”⁶⁵ The NT uses concepts of this verse to point to Satan, as do church fathers.⁶⁶ Kaiser points to Luke 10:18; 2Cor 11:14; and Rev 20,⁶⁷ and Keil suggests 2Thess 2:4.⁶⁸ 2Cor 11:14 reports that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. According to Luke 10:18 Jesus saw Satan falling from heaven, and he may have alluded to Isa 14:12 deliberately. Grogan suggests: “To interpret v. 12 and the following verses in this way means that the passage points to Satan, not directly, but indirectly, much like the way the kings of the line of David point to Christ.”⁶⁹ Witherington furnishes additional biblical texts that indirectly or directly describe fallen angels. They include Isa 24:21-22; Jude 1:6; 2Pet 2:4; and 1Pet 3:19-20.⁷⁰ He states: “For our purposes, it is only necessary to say that the powers and principalities and indeed Satan himself were believed to inhabit the realm between heaven and earth.”⁷¹

Fallen stars as demons or Satan are found in extra-canonical literature, e.g., in 1 Enoch 86; 88; 90:24 and the Testament of Solomon 20:14-17. In 1 Enoch the abyss occurs in connection with fallen stars (90:24). An allusion to it may be found in 1 Enoch 10:4-6. Although the context differs from that of Revelation, the concept that these fallen stars are evil powers that have to undergo judgment is

⁶⁵John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary 24 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1985), 210, 212.

⁶⁶Cf. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chap. 1-18*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 441.

⁶⁷Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja Kapitel 1-12*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1970), 36.

⁶⁸C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 312. He states: “A retrospective glance is now cast at the self-deification of the king of Babylon, in which he was the antitype of the devil and the type of antichrist (Dan. xi. 36; 2 Thess. ii. 4), and which had met with its reward.”

⁶⁹Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary 6* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 105.

⁷⁰Cf. Ben Witherington, III, *Revelation*, The New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151-152.

⁷¹Witherington, 153.

similar to the one found in Revelation.

In Revelation stars are (1) the angels of the seven churches (Rev 1:16,20; 2:1; 3:1), (2) the morning star of Rev 2:28 and Jesus, the bright morning star of Rev 22:16, (3) the stars that fell to the earth in connection with the mention of heavenly bodies such as the sun and the moon (Rev 6:12-13; 8:12), (4) the great star wormwood that fell from heaven (Rev 8:10-11) and the star that had fallen from heaven (Rev 9:1), (5) the twelve stars in the crown of the woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12:1), and (6) a third of the stars of heaven that were swept away by the dragon's tail (Rev 12:4). Since early in the Apocalypse stars are referred to as angels and the biblical background points into the same direction, we might assume that they represent angels—whether human or angelic messengers—in the rest of the book, at least in those cases in which they perform actions that are normally executed by living beings. For instance, the key to the abyss was given to the fallen star, and he opened it (Rev 9:1-2).

How is the term “to fall” (*piptō*) used in the Apocalypse? The verb occurs 23 times in Revelation. Nine times it refers to falling down and worshipping God or mistakenly an angel (Rev 1:17; 4:10; 5:8,14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4,10; 22:8) and has positive connotations, when the worship is directed toward God. In addition to worship, the term “to fall” is associated with the fall of stars (Rev 6:13; 8:10,10; 9:1), mountains (Rev 6:16), the sun and heat (Rev 7:16), cities (Rev 11:13; 16:19), Babylon (Rev 14:8,8; 18:2,2), and the five heads of the beast which comes out of the abyss. In Rev 2:5 Jesus criticizes the church in Ephesus for having fallen away from first love. Obviously in Revelation the term has negative connotations and is found in judgment contexts when the issue is not worship. Consequently, “having fallen” in Rev 9:1 should also be understood as a judgment setting.⁷²

The argument that this would be the only place in Revelation, where God uses an evil angel to execute his will, is based on the use of the Greek term *edothē* (it was given) in Rev 9:1, an aorist passive of the verb *didōmi* (to give) which is normally employed to point to God as the one who is actively, yet behind the scenes, involved in human history or who allows things to happen. He is the ultimate source of authority. This term is found 21 times in Revelation. However, the word is not only applied to God's allies such as the martyr under the altar (Rev 6:11), God's angel in Rev 8:3 or

⁷²Beale, 492, clearly distinguishes between *katabainō* and *piptō* stating: “Commentators have not adduced one example where a falling star metaphor is applied to a good angel.”

the bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:8), but also to destructive and evil powers (Rev 6:4,8; 13:5,7,14,15). In our immediate context power *was given* to the locusts to torment humanity (Rev 9:3,5), a negative group often associated with demons. Why then should it be ruled out that the fallen star is also a negative power? Kistemaker states:

“If we identify this star with Satan, the prince of the demons cast out of heaven to reside in the Abyss . . . , we need to understand that God is in complete control. Either Satan or one of his underlings receives the key to the Abyss, not in the sense of permanent possession but of momentary power. God allows the evil spirits temporary freedom to do their destructive deeds that are described in the succeeding verses of this chapter. God assigns the countless fallen angels to the Abyss, where they are awaiting the Judgment Day (Luke 8:21; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). He decrees the time of opening and closing of this place. He is sovereign.”⁷³

Concerning the suggestion to identify the star of Rev 9:1 with the angel in Rev 20:1-3 Farmer perceptively observes discontinuity instead of continuity. He talks about “the remarkable contrast between this star’s action and that of the angel in 20:1-3 who also held the key to the abyss. The angel locked the deceptive dragon in the abyss; the fallen star unlocked the abyss unleashing a demonic hoard.”⁷⁴

In Rev 9:1 we hear about one fallen star only, according to Rev 8:10 a great star⁷⁵ whose actions bring about extremely negative effects. It seems best to understand this star as Satan who according to Rev 12:7-9 was cast out of heaven.⁷⁶ Satan is connected to the abyss, which seems to fit best the OT and NT data as well as the language and context of Revelation.

Rev 9:11

Rev 9:11 is part of the fifth trumpet which began with the star fallen from heaven. In this text we encounter the king of the locusts who at the same time is the angel of the abyss, also called *Abaddon/Apollion* or destroyer. The majority of the expositors interpret this angel as Satan⁷⁷ or one

⁷³Kistemaker, 285.

⁷⁴Farmer, 83-84. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 117-118.

⁷⁵Cf. Stefanovic, 292-293; Corsini, 175, 324.

⁷⁶Cf. Beale, 492; Corsini, 179.

⁷⁷Cf. Hughes, 111; Kistemaker, 291-292; Osborne, 373; Stefanovic, 305.

of his sub-leaders.⁷⁸ Others suggest the possibility of an allusion to the god Apollo in this verse.⁷⁹ Still others propose that this king represents the emperor of Rome.⁸⁰

The king and angel of the abyss is called *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*. Although the terms are quite similar, they are not completely interchangeable.⁸¹ The Hebrew term *Abaddon* appears seven times in Scripture, while the Greek *Apollyon* is found in Rev 9:11 only. *Abaddon* is frequently associated with death, *sheol*, and the grave (Job 26:6; 28:22; Ps 88:11; Prov 15:11; 27:20).⁸² In Revelation *hades*, the Greek equivalent of *sheol*, and death are personified. While Jesus has the keys to death and *hades* (Rev 1:18), Death and *Hades* follow the rider on the ashen horse (Rev 6:8). According to Rev 20:13 Death and *Hades* will give up the dead that are in them. They will be thrown into the lake of fire and will quit existing. Heb 2:14 reminds us that it is the devil who has the power of death. Furthermore, in Eph 6:12 Paul reminds us that our struggle is “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places,” especially against the evil one (Eph 6:16).

Obviously *Apollyon* is derived from the noun *apōleia*, destruction. The beast of Rev 17, which will wage war against the Lamb (Rev 17:14) and will destroy the harlot (Rev 17:16), will “go to destruction.” In other words a great reversal will take place. In 2Thess 2:3 “the man of lawlessness”

⁷⁸Cf. Thomas, 38-39; Smalley, 233.

⁷⁹Cf. Roloff, 115; Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984), 195; Witherington, 134. Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 128, speaks about the possibility that this is “a derogatory allusion to the god Apollo. What the Greeks worshiped as a god was no more than a demon.”

⁸⁰Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 162-163. Hughes, 111, suggests that the terms are synonymous.

⁸¹Cf. Beasley-Murray, 162.

⁸²Cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 534. Caird, 120, states: “John has personified Abaddon, just as earlier he personified Death and Hades, and the three are all variations on a single theme.” Corsini, 180, observes: “There is a clear link between these two names [*Abaddon* and *Apollyon*], and the two names, ‘Death and Hades,’ which came at the end of the four horsemen of the seals. The action of Satan against men begins in hell (the bottomless pit) and finishes there.”

and “son of destruction” seems to be Satan and a power that he uses.⁸³ The destruction that Satan brings along or intends to afflict is described in Rev 12 where Satan’s fall is also depicted (cf. also Rev 17:8).

As indicated above the question is whether or not the fallen star should be identified with this angel of the abyss. We would suggest that the parallelism of concepts as well as the literary structure of the fifth trumpet⁸⁴ support the interpretation of the fallen star as the angel of the abyss.⁸⁵ As we have seen in Revelation stars stand for angels. The fallen angel of Rev 9:1 is an angel. At the end of the fifth trumpet without forewarning the angel of the abyss and king of the locusts is introduced. He is a destroyer whose demonic army attacks humanity. But so is the star fallen from heaven who opened the shaft of the abyss and released the demonic army.⁸⁶ It is appropriate to see in him Satan. Indeed it was Satan who tried to destroy the male child, the woman, and the church in Rev 12.

Rev 11:7

In Rev 11:7 the beast, which comes out of the abyss, temporarily kills God’s two witnesses. Ladd points out: “The abyss or ‘bottomless pit’ from which the beast ascends was the source of the demonic plagues of the fifth and sixth trumpets. The beast too is of satanic origin and power, and derives his authority from the demonic realm.”⁸⁷ Obviously it is the same beast as the one described in Rev 17.⁸⁸ This beast differs from the beasts in Rev 13 for it does not come forth from the sea or the earth, but from the abyss. In addition the sea beast receives a deadly wound after 42 months of

⁸³Cf. Nichol 7:271; Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Sacra Pagina 11 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 331. According to John 17:12 Judas is the son of perdition, but it was Satan working through him (John 13:27).

⁸⁴Osborne, 362, mentions a possible inclusion.

⁸⁵Cf. the structure suggested by E. Müller, *Microstructural Analysis*, 342-343; Stefanovic, 305.

⁸⁶Cf. Beale, 503.

⁸⁷Ladd, 156-157. Cf. Hughes, 125; Stefanovic, 350.

⁸⁸Cf. Kistemaker, 332; Murphy, 358.

activity (Rev 13:3,5).⁸⁹ The beast out of the earth begins its deceptive activity around the time that the sea beast's deadly wound is healing (Rev 13:12,14). However, the beast of Rev 11 does not receive a deadly wound after the 42 months or 1260 days (Rev 11:3), rather it inflicts such a wound on the two witnesses.⁹⁰

The two witnesses of Rev 11 should be understood as the Scriptures of the OT and NT⁹¹ which historically suffered during the French Revolution.⁹² The beast is best seen as Satan using political powers to oppose the cause of God. The same happens in chapter 12 when the dragon uses the Roman Empire in his attempt to kill the Messiah. There is no good reason to link the abyss of Rev 11, part of the same trumpet vision, to another person than Satan. Corsini holds: "In fact, John says that it is the beast which ascends from the bottomless pit which kills them (11:7), an expression which clearly refers to Satan here."⁹³

Rev 20:1-3

Rev 20 is another difficult text in Revelation. Scholars have followed different systems of interpretation. Amillennialists⁹⁴ suggest that Rev 12:7-12 and Rev 20:1-3 with their fourfold mention

⁸⁹The sections Rev 13:1-4 and 13:5-8 seem to be parallel instead of the second following the first in chronological order. In both parts mouth, blasphemy, power, and worship are mentioned in similar order. The description of the universal worship forms the concluding phrase of both sections. Cf. William H. Shea, "Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12-13," in *Symposium on Revelation - Book I*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, Volume 6, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute General, Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 354-359.

⁹⁰Adventists take the 42 months as 1260 years reaching from A.D. 538-1798. Cf. Nichol, 7:809.

⁹¹Cf. Kenneth A. Strand, "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981): 127-135; *ibid.*, "The Two Olive Trees of Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20 (1982): 257-261; Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 13/2 (2002): 30-45.

⁹²Cf. Nichol, 7:802-803.

⁹³Corsini, 200.

⁹⁴Amillennialism and postmillennialism expect Christ's second coming to take place after the Millennium, while premillennialists believe that the Second Coming precedes the Millennium. Eric Claude Webster, "The Millennium," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, edited by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 935-942, furnishes a brief description and history of amillennialism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism.

of designations of Satan refer to the same event and that Rev 19-21 should not be understood chronologically. The Millennium describes the time between Jesus' ascension and the end.⁹⁵ Premillennialists point out that (1) progression is taking place and that Rev 19-21 must be understood chronologically. At the end of Rev 19 the first two members of the satanic trinity, the sea beast and the false prophet, are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20). In Rev 20 the remaining member of the satanic trinity, Satan himself, is being judged and cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). (2) Rev 12:9 and Rev 20:1-3 do not describe the same situation, because in chapter 12 Satan is thrown out of heaven and attempts to deceive humanity (Rev 12:12 and chapter 13), while in Rev 20 Satan is cast into the abyss and is unable to deceive humanity for a thousand years.⁹⁶ (3) The Jewish background of Rev 20 suggests that the events described there will take place at the end of human history only.⁹⁷

A premillennialist, yet not dispensationalist reading of Rev 20 follows the flow of arguments and the development from Rev 15 through Rev 22, takes seriously the immediate context, and avoids a mystical or purely spiritualized interpretation.

With Rev 20:1-3 the great reversal takes place. At the end of human history Satan's power to open the abyss is taken from him. This power was given to him by God (Rev 9:1), who always is in control.⁹⁸ Now Satan himself is bound by an angel and confined to the abyss for one thousand years. It seems that Rev 17:8 points to this very situation and that Rev 20:1-3,7-10 explains the cryptic sayings about the beast in Rev 17. The beast which "was, and is not, and will come out of the abyss and goes to destruction" is Satan, who was presented as the great red dragon in Rev 12.⁹⁹

⁹⁵Cf. Farmer, 123, 125; Smalley, 504-505.

⁹⁶Cf. Alan Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, volume 12, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 581; Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997), 446-447; Witherington, 245; Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, reprint (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1984), 592.

⁹⁷Cf. Witherington, 245, 247. He states: "In John's theology Christ has now paid the price on the cross. Since that event, Satan no longer has a legitimate place in the heavenly council. He will be cast into the abyss once the Parousia transpires, and he will be cast into the lake of fire once the millennium is over. His fall is threefold" (247).

⁹⁸Cf. Hughes, 209, stresses that the power over Satan and the abyss belongs to God. He also calls the angel of the abyss (Rev 9:11) Satan. However, for him the fall of Satan in Rev 12 and the binding of Satan in Rev 20 are the same event. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that the Millennium begins with Christ's incarnation (209-211).

⁹⁹Beale, 865, has noticed the parallelism with Rev 20: "The threefold formula corresponds to the career of Satan in Rev 20:1-10." He also states on the same page: "The beast's origin, the abyss, both here [Rev 17:8a] and in

Summary

In the NT the abyss is the place of the dead and the dwelling place of demons. In Revelation the abyss is linked to demonic agents and especially Satan. The fallen star, the angel of the abyss, and the beast out of the abyss, all seem to point to Satan. Most clearly the connection between Satan and the abyss is spelled out in Rev 20. Therefore, the beast on which Babylon sits, i.e., the beast of Rev 17 which is associated with the abyss and which differs from the beast in Rev 13, is best understood as Satan who works through political powers.¹⁰⁰

d. The Phases of the Beast

The beast “was, and is not, and will come out of the abyss and goes to destruction.” The beast is described similarly three times in Rev 17:8 and 11:

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|-------------|---|---------------------------------|
| (1) | <u>It was</u> | AND IS NOT | <i>and is about to come up out of the abyss</i> | <i>AND GOES TO DESTRUCTION.</i> |
| (2) | <u>It was</u> | AND IS NOT | <i>and will come</i> | —. |
| (3) | <u>It was</u> | AND IS NOT, | <i>and is an eighth and is of the seven,</i> | <i>AND GOES TO DESTRUCTION.</i> |

A major question--when looking at these phases of the beast--is, How should we understand these different phases? At what time do they take place? Or more specifically: Does the “is not” phase describe the time of John, i.e., the first century A.D., our present situation or the future?

Preterist expositors relate the “is not” state to the first century as shown above and sometimes connect it to the *Nero redivivus* myth.¹⁰¹ Thomas, however, suggests “to locate the ‘is not’ state of the beast entirely in the future and make that the point of reference for the total description.” He goes on to say: “Verse 8 is a part of the chapter that is purely prophetic, but vv. 9-11 are an injected

11:7, suggests the demonic origin and powers of the beast (as in 9:1-2, 11; cf. 20:1-3,7).” But he does not identify the beast as Satan. Prigent, 554-555, points to parallels between Rev 20 and other parts of Revelation and apart from Rev 12-13 also mentions Rev 17.

¹⁰⁰Walvoord, 249-250, notes: “There is a confusing similarity between the descriptions afforded Satan who was apparently described as the king over the demons in the abyss (9:11), ‘the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit’ (11:7), the beast whose ‘deadly wound was healed’ (13:3), and the beast of 17:8. . . . Only Satan himself actually comes from the abyss.”

¹⁰¹Cf. Prigent, 491.

explanation to help in understanding the prophecy.”¹⁰² Although we basically agree with his assessment here, his end time scenario differs widely from ours since he takes a dispensationalist approach to the interpretation of Revelation. On the other hand, Kistemaker asserts: “The beast today *is not*.” Concerning the meaning of the “is not” phase he comes to the following conclusion: “God revealed himself as the ‘I am’ (Exod. 3:14) who is without beginning and without end. But Satan is a creature with a beginning whose end is perdition. He can never be the ‘I am’ (John 8:58), even though his stated goal is to occupy God’s place (2 Thess. 2:4).”¹⁰³ This quotation does not only contain a helpful theological insight, but also seems to imply that Satan is the beast of Rev 17 standing in opposition to God. But if this is true, then it is not possible for him not to exist today. Later Kistemaker calls the beast the Antichrist with Satan being in the background.¹⁰⁴

We suggest that for the following reasons the “it was” phase should refer to historic time, while from the “is not” phase onward we are dealing with eschatology:

(1) The “is not” phase can be understood as a future development, because in Revelation the present tense oftentimes stands for the future (see, e.g., Rev 17:11-13; 16:15). Furthermore, the phrase “it goes to destruction” in the very same sentence is also used in the present tense, although it refers to the end of the beast.¹⁰⁵

(2) More important, however, is that Rev 17 is a description of the future judgment on the harlot. The perspective from which John observes the beast is that of the sixth and seventh plague (cf. Rev 17:1). In Rev 12 and 13 evil powers are engaged in a war against the saints. However, Rev 17 does not deal with this war and the persecution of the saints. It only mentions in passing that the

¹⁰²Thomas, 293.

¹⁰³Kistemaker, 469.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵The following chart shows that after the initial imperfect only present tenses are used in Greek, although *mellō* with infinitive expresses a future action; but so does the futuristic present in the phrase “goes to destruction” and probably in the statement “is not.” The use of tenses in the description of the different phases of the beast may point to a hiatus between “was” and the rest of the description which should be understood as referring to the future:

THE BEAST . . . WAS	AND IS NOT	AND WILL COME UP OUT OF THE ABYSS	AND GOES TO DESTRUCTION
<i>to thērion ēn</i>	<i>kai ouk estin</i>	<i>kai mellei anabainein ex tēs abussou</i>	<i>kai eis apōleian hupagei</i>
imperfect	present tense	present tense and a present infinitive	present tense

It should be noted that the phases of the beast listed at the end of verse 8 use a future tense, while the phases listed in verse 11 begin with an imperfect followed by verbs in the present tense only.

harlot is drunk of their blood. The issue is that one of the bowl angels shows John the judgment on the harlot and those involved with her (Rev 17:1). Therefore, the “is not” phase relates to judgment and from our present perspective is still future.¹⁰⁶ Strand argues:

To seek fulfillment in history, for example, for the ‘is not’ phase of the beast of Rev 17, when that phase is obviously a view of judgment, is illogical. Or to treat the whole of chapter 17 as having historical, rather than eschatological, fulfillment is to miss the very point of the chapter and of the whole second part of the book of Revelation in which it occurs. This is not to say, however, that there are absolutely no historical reflections in chapter 17.¹⁰⁷

(3) Rev 4 through 14 contains recapitulation.¹⁰⁸ To some extent recapitulation is also found from Rev 15 onward. Strand points out that Rev 17 is a recapitulation of the sixth and seventh plague, while the “portrayal in chapter 20 of Satan in the ‘bottomless pit’ or ‘abyss’ for a thousand years, of his release and revived activity thereafter, and of the final destruction befalling him and his armies furnishes a sort of recapitulation”¹⁰⁹ of the fate of the scarlet beast.

(4) According to Rev 17:3 John sees the harlot sitting on the scarlet beast. According to Rev 17:7 this beast carries the harlot Babylon. In both cases present tenses are used, as is with the statement that the beast “is not.” However, it is not possible that the harlot sits on a beast that is not. Neither is it possible that heads and horns of the beast exist, when the beast itself does not exist. According to Rev 13:3 one of the heads of the sea beast was mortally wounded, which means that the entire beast was mortally wounded (Rev 13:14). A part stands for the whole. Likewise in Rev 17 the heads or horns cannot exist without the beast, and the harlot cannot sit on a non-existent beast. These observations strongly point to the fact that from the “is not” phase onward the phases of the beast must be seen as eschatological developments which are related to judgment and have not yet taken place.

¹⁰⁶Cf. Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis* (Naples: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1982), 54. He also points to the shifting of crowns with the different animals in Revelation. The dragon has crowns on his heads, the sea beast has them on their horns, and the beast out of the abyss has no crowns. While the first two are subsequently reigning in history, the beast from the abyss is viewed from a final judgment perspective.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 54-55.

¹⁰⁸Cf. Ekkehardt Mueller, “Recapitulation in Revelation 4-11,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 9/1-2 (1998): 260-277.

¹⁰⁹Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 49.

After having discussed the “is not” phase of the beast we turn to the phase when the beast comes out of the abyss. The question is, if the Book of Revelation explains this incident and how it explains it. In Revelation events and actions are being introduced that later are explained in more details. For instance, Rev 11:18 foreshadows the rest of the Book of Revelation: The fury of the nations is described in Rev 12-13, the judgment of God in Rev 14-18, the reward for God’s servants in Rev 21-22, and the destruction of the destroyers of the earth in Rev 19-20. The sixth and seventh plagues point to the fall of Babylon and the battle of Armageddon which are spelled out in more detail in Rev 17-19. The waters of Rev 16:12 are found again in Rev 17:15. Kistemaker observes:

We note that chapter 20 presents a picture that is concurrent with preceding chapters that relate repetitive scenes on the judgment. Thus, the twenty-four elders announce the time of judgment (11:18) and the Son of Man inaugurates the Judgment Day (14:14-20). God pours out his wrath in anticipation of the final judgment (16:17-21), the rider on a white horse judges with justice to defeat his enemies (19:11-21), and God opens the books to judge each person at the last judgment (20:11-15).¹¹⁰

These “repetitive scenes” are, however, not just parallels, but they contain additional information and elements of progression. As mentioned above, Strand calls them “recapitulation” and suggests that recapitulation of the latter phases of the beast takes place in Rev 20.¹¹¹ We mentioned earlier that in Rev 17 the heads, horns, waters, and the harlot were further explained and identified. The beast was not. A reason may be that additional information on the beast would follow later. Furthermore, we have tried to show that the scarlet beast is Satan. That means that the same concepts and partially the same language¹¹² occur in Rev 17:8,11 and Rev 20.

Rev 20 describes the beast’s future coming up out of the bottomless pit as Satan’s release from the abyss prison. In other words the phase dealing with the beast coming up out of the abyss and its subsequent destruction depicts events that follow the Millennium. Then the phase “is not” should be understood as the time during the Millennium. The first phase, describing the beast as “it was” refers to historical time and ends with the beginning of the Millennium. It is the time which points to

¹¹⁰Kistemaker, 532.

¹¹¹Cf. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 49.

¹¹²E.g., the abyss appears in both cases. In Rev 17:1 and 20:4 the same term *krima* designates the judgment, whereas Rev 18 and 19 also use the term *krisis*, which is neither found in Rev 17 nor Rev 20. Those whose names were not written in the book of life occur in Rev 17:8 and 20:12,15.

Satan’s activity during human history until Christ’s second coming. The heads would basically fall into this time, whereas the horns seem to come on the scene at the very end of time only. However, John’s special focus is on the judgment and thus on events taking place in conjunction with and after Christ’s second coming.

THE BEAST (Rev 17)

<i>It was.</i>	<i>It is not.</i>	<i>It is about to come out of the abyss.</i>	<i>It goes to destruction.</i>
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SATAN (Rev 20)

<i>He existed and worked (Rev 12).</i>	<i>He is imprisoned in the abyss; no deception is possible (Rev 20:1-3).</i>	<i>After the Millennium he is released, gathers the resurrected opponents of God, and attacks the Holy City (Rev 20:7-9).</i>	<i>After the Millennium he will be thrown into the lake of fire and will perish (Rev 20:9-10).</i>
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<u>Historical Time</u>	<u>In connection with the Second Coming</u>	<u>After the Millennium</u>	<u>After the Millennium</u>
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It has been objected that the dragon of Rev 20 is not called “beast” (*thērion*) while the scarlet beast receives this designation. However, in Revelation a number of beings are introduced with different names and symbols. For instance, Jesus is the lion and the lamb, the male child and most probably Michael. Satan is also introduced with different names and symbols. He is the dragon, the serpent, and the devil (Rev 12:9). One should not *a priori* postulate that he cannot be introduced with the image of a beast.

Normally in the OT and NT the term “beast” does not function as a broad term including the entire animal kingdom but refers to wild animals or land animals. However, the term occasionally was used to include insects and birds “and later any ‘animal’ . . .”¹¹³ In Acts 28:4 Paul was bitten by a “snake.” He shook off the ‘beast.’ Although another word for snake is used in Acts (*echidna*) than it is in Rev 12 (*opsis*), the concept is the same. A snake can be a beast.

Beasts in Revelation are the wild beasts (Rev 6:8), the beast out of the abyss (Rev 11:7; 17:3,7,8,11,12,13,16,17), the sea beast (13:1-4,12,12,14,14,15,15,15, 17,18; 14:9,11; 15:2;

¹¹³Werner Forester, “θηρίον,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 volumes, edited by G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 3:133.

16:2,10,13; 19:19,20,20; 20:4,10), the beast out of the earth (13:11) and possibly every unclean beast in Rev 18:2, if this reading is retained. Doubtless the most frequently mentioned beast is the sea beast. As shown above, the sea beast and the beast from the abyss are different entities. Since the abyss is again and again associated with Satan, he should be understood as this beast, as well as the angel of the abyss, the king of the locusts, *Abaddon*, and *Apollyon* of Rev 9:11.¹¹⁴

e. Other Characteristics of the Beast

The color of the beast of Rev 17 has already been mentioned. It is similar to the color of the dragon. On the other hand the harlot and the beast, on which she sits, share to some extent the same color. Scarlet was one of the colors of the sanctuary (Exod 26:1; Num 19:6; 2Chron 3:14).¹¹⁵ It described the attraction of Solomon's bride (Songs 4:3). It was the color of luxurious garments (Jer 4:30) and the robe put on Jesus to mock him as a king (Matt 27:28-29). However, in Isa 1:18 scarlet is compared to sin. In Rev 17:3-4; 18:16 it is the color of evil powers and in Rev 18:12 part of the luxurious merchandise of Babylon. Kistemaker concludes that "in Revelation it stands for evil exhibited by demonic power."¹¹⁶ Although the color may originally point to an imitation of God's institutions, it also manifests luxury, seduction, sin, and evil. "The scarlet color of the beast is linked directly to the prostitute 'drunk from the blood of the saints and from the witnesses of Jesus' (Rev. 17:6). The color is very appropriate for the oppressive character of the beast in relation to God's people."¹¹⁷ Nichol describes it as pointing to "the epitome of evil."¹¹⁸

The heads of the sea beast contain blasphemous names (Rev 13:1), and the sea beast blasphemes God, his house, and those who dwell in heaven (Rev 13:5-6). However, the scarlet beast

¹¹⁴In the Adventist Bible Commentary Nichol, 7:851, acknowledges: "Accordingly, the beast itself may be identified as Satan working through those political agencies, in all ages, that have submitted to his control."

¹¹⁵Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (London: T & T Clark, 2000), 284, notes that "the harlot is dressed like the temple; arrayed in purple and scarlet; bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls." She is a parody of divine realities. This is also true for the beast.

¹¹⁶Kistemaker, 464.

¹¹⁷Stefanovic, 507.

¹¹⁸Nichol, 7:851.

is completely covered with blasphemous names¹¹⁹ which seems to be an intensification. The noun *blasphēmia* describes slander (Matt 15:19; Eph 4:31; Rev 2:9). It was also used by Jesus' adversaries who charged him of blasphemy because he claimed to be God. In Rev 17:3 the scarlet beast may be charged with absolute blasphemy because it attempts to take God's place. This fits best Satan.¹²⁰ Prigent talking about "perfect opposition" by the beast that was, is not, will come out of the abyss and goes to destruction to the true God connects it to the Roman empire.¹²¹ However, "perfect opposition" is most clearly seen in God's main adversary, Satan, with whom Michael had to engage in a battle and who was cast out of heaven. Limiting this imagery to the first century A.D. situation does not do justice to the scope of the Apocalypse.

The scarlet beast has an interesting relationship with the harlot. At first, the harlot sits on the beast, and the beast carries her. It looks as if the harlot would control the beast.¹²² However, the end of Rev 17 shows that this is not the case, at least not permanently. The harlot cannot control the beast. The alliance breaks apart, and the beast and its horns turn against the harlot destroying her. Again this is a fitting example for Satan himself who uses human instrumentalities for his purposes and in the end ruins them. Therefore Jesus calls Satan "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44) and Peter compares him to a roaring lion (1Pet 5:8). He used Judas to betray Jesus (John 13:2), who then felt remorse but committed suicide (Matt 27:3-5).

Rev 13:3 declares that the whole earth was amazed observing the healing of the deadly wound of the sea beast. As a consequence they worshiped the dragon and the sea beast (Rev 13:4,8). The word "to be amazed/to wonder" is also used in Rev 17. Actually these two chapters are the only ones in which *thaumazō* occurs. According to Rev 17:6 John was amazed/astonished when he saw the harlot. According to Rev 17:7 the angel asked him, why he was amazed. Finally, the earth dwellers

¹¹⁹Kistemaker, 464.

¹²⁰Prigent, 488, sees the difference between Rev 13:1 and 17:3. He also understands blasphemy as a claim of divinity. However, he takes Rev 17:4 as "an allusion to the cult of the emperors."

¹²¹Ibid., 491.

¹²²Cf. Stefanovic, 507.

are amazed when they see the resurgence of the scarlet beast.¹²³ The last phase of the beast, namely going to destruction, is left out at the end of verse 8 which indicates that the inhabitants of the earth are not yet aware of the final ruin of the scarlet beast but are just amazed to see it again after it had not been.

The verb *thaumazō* does not necessarily indicate that the sea beast and the scarlet beast are the same power. Humans are amazed to see the recovery of the sea beast, the splendor and cruelty of harlot Babylon, the resurgence of the scarlet beast. In Revelation *thaumazō* is not limited to one entity. Furthermore, universal worship as a consequence of the amazement is mentioned in Rev 13 and attributed to the dragon, the sea beast, and the image of the beast (Rev 13:5; 14:9) but is not referred to in Rev 17. The situation is also different as are the tenses of the verbs.¹²⁴ Whereas the sea beast makes war against the saints, the scarlet beast makes war against harlot Babylon, which obviously includes the sea beast.

2. The Seven Heads

a. Heads, Mountains, and Kings

The seven heads of the beast (Rev 17:3,7) are described in a more detailed way in Rev 17:9-11. They are also called seven mountains and seven kings. Although the seven mountains are oftentimes associated with Rome,¹²⁵ this identification is far from certain. Barker, for instance, holds that “seven mountains were a feature of the mythic geography of Jerusalem.”¹²⁶ Since the term “mountain” is a symbol as much as “head” is and represents “kings,” we should not look for literal

¹²³Smalley, 435, suggests that *thaumazō* in verse 8 should be understood as admiration, not “astonished perplexity” as in verses 6-7. Wall, 207, states: “Perhaps the greater irony is that the inhabitants of earth, whose sinfulness refuses God’s grace and shalom, continue to be fascinated by evil power, which will ultimately destroy them.”

¹²⁴In Rev 13:3 an aorist passive third person singular is found, in Rev 17:6 an aorist active first person singular, in Rev 17:7 an aorist active second person singular, and in Rev 17:8 a future passive third person plural.

¹²⁵See the discussion at the beginning of the paper.

¹²⁶Barker, 285. Based on 1 Enoch 18.8 she suggests that the central mountain which reached to God was the one on which God’s throne was placed. On its right and left side were three mountains each. “The harlot was enthroned in the temple, presumably sharing the heavenly throne as the consort of the base, just as Wisdom had shared the throne of the LORD (Wisd. 9.4).”

mountains but “should look for the *scriptural* usage of the term ‘mountain’ in cases where the term is employed as a symbol.”¹²⁷ Kistemaker argues that when the woman is said to sit on many waters (Rev 17:1,15), on the beast (Rev 17:3), and on seven hills or mountains (Rev 17:9) all three places have to be understood symbolically.¹²⁸ Therefore, the seven mountains do not point to Rome but to world powers “that have their place in history.”¹²⁹ Such an understanding also rules out the common identification of the heads with specific Roman emperors.

In Scripture symbolic mountains stand for empires or kingdoms. The mountain in Dan 2:35 represents the everlasting kingdom of God (Dan 2:44-45). According to Jer 51:25 Babylon was a “destroying mountain.” Barker maintains: “The Isaiah Targum knew that mountains were kingdoms so that ‘You shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff’, becomes ‘You shall kill the Gentiles and destroy [them] and make the kingdoms like the chaff’ (Isa. 41.15).”¹³⁰ Likewise the kings have to be understood as kingdoms. The four kings mentioned in Dan 7:17 are not individual rulers but kingdoms (Dan 7:23).¹³¹ Although in Dan 2:37-38 king

¹²⁷Strand, “The Seven Heads,” 186; cf. Kistemaker, 470-471.

¹²⁸(1) The harlot sits on many waters (Rev 17:1). (2) She sits on a scarlet beast (Rev 17:3). (3) She sits on seven mountains (Rev 17:9). (4) She sits on the waters which are “peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues” (Rev 17:15). Statements (1), (3), and (4) are part of angelic speeches, while statement (2) is a part of a vision. In the apocalypse a person or an institution may be portrayed under different symbols due to a shift from a speech or audition to a vision. For instance, in Rev 5:5-6 Jesus is portrayed as Lion and as Lamb. Both symbols represent him. The 144,000 whose number John heard (Rev 7:4) seem also to be the great multitude that he sees (Rev 7:9). However, in Rev 17 the same principle may not be strictly applicable. In this chapter there is not only a shift from a speech to a vision but a shift from a speech to a vision and back to one or two speeches. This is a scenario different from that of the two examples just mentioned. The waters, the beast, and the heads/mountains are political powers opposed to God. This is the common denominator. The harlot attempts to use them. However, these entities are not completely synonymous. The heads are mentioned separately in the vision as well as the angelic speech and should not be completely merged. The waters are specifically identified at the end of the chapter (verse 15) and are kept separate from the beast (verse 16). The same situation is already found in Rev 16. The water of the Euphrates river which dries up (Rev 16:12) is not to be confused with the dragon, the sea beast or the false prophet (Rev 16:13). What can be said with regard to the entities on which the harlot sits in Rev 17 is that they as political powers initially work together and in one way or another support the harlot. Cf. Beale, 848, who distinguishes between the multitudes and the beast.

¹²⁹Kistemaker, 471.

¹³⁰Barker, 285. Beale, 868, shows that “in the Apocalypse it [the Greek term *oros*] always means ‘mountain’ and is used figuratively to connote strength . . . This usage points beyond a literal reference to Rome’s ‘hills’ and to a figurative meaning, ‘kingdoms,’ especially in the light of 8:8 and 14:1.”

¹³¹Ladd, 227-228, declares: “The four beasts of Dan. 7 were said to represent four kings (Dan. 7:17) when, more precisely, Daniel means the kingdoms over which they rule.” Cf. Stefanovic, 515. Kistemaker, 472, points out

Nebuchadnezzar is identified with the golden head, the next metal of the image is identified with a kingdom (Dan 2:39) which suggests that verses 37-39 do not refer to Nebuchadnezzar's kingship only but to the Babylonian kingdom.

b. The Division of the Heads

The seven heads are divided into three segments with an eighth element being added: (a) Five are fallen, (b) one is, (c) the other has not come yet, and (d) the eighth is the beast.

Five of the heads are fallen, one is. The phrase "one is" seem to relate to John in one way or the other. There is a specific time in which John is found and in which one of the seven heads also "is." The question is whether this time is the first century A.D., when John lived, or whether it refers to the time of events shown to him in the vision.

Some expositors have suggested that as the sixth head, namely the one that "is," relates to John's time either in the first century or at a later time in vision, so the "is not" phase of the beast could also relate to John's time and therefore to past history rather than to a future event. In this case the phases of the beast and the heads would probably be parallel.¹³²

<i>The beast</i> was	and is not	and is about to come	and goes to destruction.
		out of the abyss	
<i>Five heads</i> are fallen	one is	the other has not yet come,	the eighth.
		will remain a little while	

Although it is tempting to associate the phases of the beast with the division of the heads, the text does not demand such a procedure. Even though both phrases use the present tense, it is hardly conceivable that at the same time the beast "is not" and one of its heads "is." Furthermore, we have shown above that statements related to the phases of the beast portray it from an end time perspective and point to its future judgment beginning with the "is not" phase. Therefore, the "is not" phase of

that even in verse 17 the LXX has already used *basileia* in harmony with verse 23.


¹³²Cf. Doukhan, 162-163. Commenting on it he writes: "The second phase predicts a period of absence that corresponds to the fatal wound of the beast (verse 11)—the time of the sixth king. The prophet observes the paradoxical state of this king, who 'exists' even though he looks as if he is dead (Rev. 17:8, 10, 11; cf. 13:3)."

the beast does not connect this period to John’s time.¹³³ It seems best and most consistent not to take the phases of the beast and the segments of the heads as strictly parallel accounts.

There is another line of argument which needs to be explored. The eighth in Rev 17:11 connects the phases of the beast to the division of the heads. As shown on page 25, the phase “and is an eighth” is parallel to the phase when the beast is coming out of the abyss and relates to judgment. This phase follows the division of the heads into five plus one plus another one, because the heads are successive and seem to come in an uninterrupted sequence.¹³⁴ As already mentioned the “is not” phase of the beast can hardly fit the time periods of the five that are fallen, the one that is, or the one that has not come yet, because otherwise a head would be present, while the beast itself is nonexistent. This observation indicates that the “was” phase of the beast coincides with the divisions of the heads being followed by the “is not,” the coming out of the abyss/being the eighth, and the destruction phases of the beast.

The Beast

It was	<i>and is not</i>	AND IS AN EIGHTH/ COMES OUT OF THE ABYSS	<i>and goes to destruction</i>
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<i>The Heads</i>	AND IS AN EIGHTH		
<i>Five are fallen</i>	<i>one is</i>	<i>the other has not come yet</i>	

The seven heads then relate to historic time. Strand states that “though John sees the vision from the ‘is not’ phase (judgment), the heads and horns are historical entities belonging to the ‘was’ phase.”¹³⁵ This seems obvious when we look at the vision as a whole. Together with the beast the

¹³³If indeed the phases of the beast starting with the “is not” phase are related to the time during and after the Millennium, the seven heads should be placed in historical time, that is, the “was” phase of the beast. Otherwise during the Millennium a head-kingdom would need to survive while the beast “is not,” and after the Millennium a seventh kingdom would need to follow.

¹³⁴Cf. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 56; Thomas, 296, 297, 300.

¹³⁵Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 55.

horns are involved in the downfall of the harlot just prior to the Millennium and the establishment of God's glorious everlasting kingdom. The heads are not even mentioned in this connection.

c. John's Time

A natural understanding of Rev 17:10, "and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while" seems to imply that at the time John wrote the Book of Revelation five kingdoms had fallen and the sixth was ruling.¹³⁶ The two visions in Rev 17:3-6 are not dealing with this situation, nor are we told that John was transported into another time during the explanation given by the angel in Rev 17:7-18. Obviously, John lived during the period of the sixth head. In addition, the Book of Revelation was addressed to Christians living in the first century plus those living in later centuries. Probably early Christians would have understood verse 10 in such a way that the sixth head referred to the time they were living in. If we assume that the sixth head was not ruling when Revelation was penned and John had been taken to another time—although Rev 17:10 is part of an angelic explanation and not a vision—then we are not able to come up with any definite interpretation of Rev 17, because there is no way to determine in which time John was transported, whether he was in the first centuries A.D., the medieval ages, the time directly after 1798, or at an even later time. In such a case prophecy containing chronological statements would be almost meaningless. The only way to come up with a reasonable interpretation of the seven heads is to locate the sixth head in the first century A.D. Strand confirms this conclusion: "The explanation of the seven heads and ten horns . . . must be from the viewpoint of John at the time of his writing. After all how else can *explanation* be given than in terms of what exists, even though the vision itself is from the perspective of eschatological judgment when the beast 'is not'?"¹³⁷

d. Identification of the Heads

At the time of John, five heads were fallen and one existed. The existing one was the Roman Empire. The five preceding kingdoms start with Egypt and continue with Assyria, Babylon, Medo-

¹³⁶See, Mounce, 316.

¹³⁷Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 55.

Persia, and Greece.¹³⁸ Although this can be deduced logically once the kingdom existing at John's time is identified, there is additional information found in Revelation which points to Egypt as the first empire. Egypt is mentioned by name in Rev 11:8. Although this Egypt is a symbolical Egypt, because it is said that the Lord was crucified there, it still reminds us of the ancient empire of the Pharaohs. It is the earliest empire mentioned in Revelation. Furthermore, Strand has shown that the first five trumpets and the first five plagues are modeled after the Egyptian plagues. Therefore, he talks about the "Exodus from Egypt Motif" in Revelation.¹³⁹ Egypt as a world empire was followed by the Assyrians. After them the kingdoms known from Dan 2, 7, and 8 follow. The sixth head would be the Roman empire and the seventh the Papacy.

Reynolds understands the sixth head as Rome in both pagan and papal form. The seventh head would then be the beast coming up from the earth (Rev 13b). In his opinion this interpretation would fit the phrase "he must remain a little while."¹⁴⁰ This is a viable suggestion. However, in Revelation pagan and papal Rome are kept somewhat separate.¹⁴¹ Although the dragon of Rev 12 worked through pagan Rome to do away with the Messiah¹⁴² and papal Rome to attack the true church of God, the emphasis is on Satan rather than on the powers he used. They are not even mentioned, but

¹³⁸Cf. Beale, 875: "The attempt to identify the seven kings with particular respective world empires may be more successful [than the attempt to identify the heads with Roman emperors], since it is more in keeping with the 'seven heads' in Dan. 7:3-7 which represent four specific empires. The first five kings, who 'have fallen' are identified with Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece; Rome is the one who 'is,' followed by a yet unknown kingdom to come." On page 560 he had stated: "Just as the kingdoms with seven heads in Dan 7:4-7 spanned history from Babylon to the end, so the seven-headed beast in Revelation 17 likewise spans many centuries and likely all of history . . ." Osborne, 619, and Mounce, 317, list the same empires. However, Mounce shows that Alford has identified the seventh head as "the Christian empire beginning with Constantine" (317). Kistemaker, 471, mentions the five empires that have perished: Babylonia, Assyria, Neo-Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greco-Macedonia. The sixth head is Rome. The seventh are "all antichristian governments between the fall of Rome and the final empire of the antichrist" (472). Whereas Beale and Mounce mention this particular interpretation but follow others, Kistemaker seems to subscribe to the one presented here.

¹³⁹Cf. K. A. Strand, "'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes" in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies, Book 1*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, edited by F. B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 67.

¹⁴⁰Edwin Reynolds, "The Seven-headed Beast of Rev 17," 105.

¹⁴¹The second trumpet seems to deal with the fall of the Roman Empire only and does not seem to refer to papal Rome.

¹⁴²He used King Herod, a ruler dependant on Rome, who attempted to kill Jesus (Rev 12:4). Palestine was part of the Roman empire. Cf. Nichol 7:807. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 951, calls him a client king.

must be deduced from history. However, papal Rome is portrayed as an own entity, namely the sea beast of Rev 13a.¹⁴³ This is not to deny that it contains traces of pagan Rome as well as of other empires. Furthermore, Rev 12, 13, and 17 are based on Dan 7 more than on Dan 8. The former distinguishes between the terrible beast itself and the little horn (Dan 7:19-27), whereas the latter has only one power, the small horn, following the Greek empire (Dan 8:8-9,21,23). If one chooses to identify the sixth head with both pagan and papal Rome and the seventh with the beast coming out of the earth, one is forced, according to the data furnished in Rev 13, to postulate that part of the sixth head is coexisting with the seventh head. The text of Rev 17 does not indicate such an arrangement but seems to favor a chronological interpretation of the heads.

e. The Seventh Head and the Shortness of Time

The seventh head is said to remain for “a little [while].” Some have suggested that this cannot be applied to the Papacy, because the Papacy has already existed longer than several of the other kingdoms combined. The term used here to describe the little while is *oligos*, a term clearly distinguished from others that indicate time or shortness of time.¹⁴⁴ The word *oligos*, “little,” “small,” “few,” “short,” is found four times in Revelation. In the messages to the seven churches it describes the quantity of things (Rev 2:14) and persons (Rev 3:4), whereas in Rev 12:12 and 17:10 it refers to time (*oligon kairon*). Rev 12:12 is interesting because the text states that after Satan’s fight with Michael and his defeat “the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has a short time.” This “short time” has started with Christ’s cross and still continues, consisting in the

¹⁴³The sea beast is characterized by blasphemy, war against the saints, and the time span of 42 months (Rev 13:5-7). These features remind us of the little horn power in Dan 7:20-21,25. There is a problem with the law in Dan 7:25, and there is a problem with the law in Rev 12-14, because the remnant are singled out as the ones who keep the law of God. The time frame in Dan 7, the connection to the fourth beast, as well as the little horn’s character and activities point to the power of the Papacy. For further discussion of the sea beast see Nichol, 7:816-817, Rodríguez, 22-32.

¹⁴⁴In Rev 6:11 and 20:3 shortness of time is described with the phrase *chronon mikron* or *mikron chronon*. The martyrs have to wait for a while. Satan will be released for a short time. According to Rev 22:10 time is near (*kairos engus*). In any of these cases the shortness of time cannot be determined. The nearness lasts almost two millennia. Smalley, 505, commenting on Rev 20:3 suggest that “the idea of limited time and power in Revelation . . . seems to be an image referring consistently to the bounds of the Christian age . . .”

meantime of about two millennia.¹⁴⁵

The length of time expressed by *oligos* is dependent upon that with which it is compared. In Rev. 12:12 *oligos* defines the period of time from the casting out of Satan at the time of the crucifixion of Christ to the end of Satan's tyranny over the inhabitants of earth. This period of time is described as *oligos* in comparison with the more than 4,000 years preceding the crucifixion.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, the "little [time]" of the seventh head does not exclude the Papacy as the fulfillment of the seventh head.

f. The Eighth

The eighth is neither called "head" nor "king". There are seven heads, seven kings, and seven mountains (Rev 17:9). The eighth is "from the seven" but not "*one* of the seven" as some translations suggest. The Greek text does not use the numeral "one" but just reads "of the seven" which may indicate that the beast relates to all seven heads but is not necessarily to be identified with any one of them. This is supported by the fact that the seven heads are introduced with a definite article ("the seven," "the five," "the one," "the other," "the seven"—Rev 17:9-11) whereas the eighth lacks an article and is thus distinguished from the others. The idea seems to be that the eighth summarizes all the seven and is their climax but is not one like them.¹⁴⁷ "This beast is not one of the seven kings/kingdoms (v. 10) but personifies the totality of evil in them . . . [It] is the concentration of all that is evil."¹⁴⁸ Although Corsini calls the eighth a king, he is quite clear when he writes: "Satan is 'the

¹⁴⁵Kistemaker, 472, makes a similar observation stating that "*a little while*, . . . in Revelation takes on a meaning of its own. For instance, cast out of heaven, Satan knows that his time is short (12:12). This short time ought not to be taken literally but symbolically, much the same as the reference to 1,260 days, forty-two months, and three and half years are understood figuratively (11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5). Hence, the term *a little while* is not a chronological period but functions within a comprehensive span of time." On the other hand, Beale, 872, suggests "that the first six 'heads' (=kingdoms) last a long time, likely throughout history, in contrast to the seventh 'head.'" He supports his suggestion with Rev 20:3 when Satan is loosed "for a little time." However, Rev 20:3 uses different wording (*mikron chronon*) and therefore is not really comparable to Rev 17:10 (*oligon*) and Rev 12:12 (*oligon kairon*).

¹⁴⁶Nichol, 7:811.

¹⁴⁷Nichol, 7:856, suggests: "Absence in the Greek of the definite article before the word 'eighth' suggests that the beast itself was the real authority back of the seven heads, and that it is therefore more than merely another head, the eighth in a series. It is their summation and climax—the beast itself." This observation is supported by Kistemaker, 473, and Mounce, 318.

¹⁴⁸Kistemaker, 473. Cf. Ladd, 231.

eighth king' and he 'belongs to the seven' in the sense that of all the evil and rebellious spirits who have dominated the world, he is the consummate expression."¹⁴⁹ The parallelism with the phases of the beast in verse 8 indicates that the eighth is associated with the beast coming out of the abyss.

3. The Ten Horns

The end of Rev 17 describes the battle of the beast and the ten horns against the harlot. The horns are also called kings (Rev 17:12). At John's time they had not received their kingdom yet. As the seven kings/heads the ten horns are political powers during the time of the seventh head.¹⁵⁰ They will receive authority¹⁵¹ for one hour together with the beast (Rev 17:12) with which they have united and which they support (Rev 17:13,17). According to verse 14 they will wage war against the Lamb; according to verse 16 they will attack their ally, harlot Babylon, and destroy her. ". . . there is no cohesion in evil; it is always self-destructive."¹⁵² The battle against Jesus and probably his people¹⁵³ was already referred to in Rev 16:12-16. This battle as well as its outcome are further described in Rev 19:11-21.¹⁵⁴ In both passages Jesus is called the Lord of lords and Kings of kings, although in reversed order (Rev 17:14; 19:16). The destruction of Babylon by the loss of her support and the

¹⁴⁹Corsini, 325.

¹⁵⁰Cf. Beale, 879, who connects the horns with the seventh head, because in John's time these powers are yet to come.

¹⁵¹It is likely that the present tense of "receive" should be understood as a future tense, especially in view of verse 11 where future developments are also expressed with present tenses. See also verse 13.

¹⁵²Morris, 206.

¹⁵³Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 952.

¹⁵⁴Cf. Stefanovic, 516; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 952-953. Beale, 880-881, extensively deals with this war and shows connections between Rev 17 and Dan 7 as well as Dan 4. It should be noted that although Rev 16, 17, and 19 seem to deal with the same event, these three passages are not completely identical in their description of the powers involved. In Rev 16 the dragon, the sea beast, the false prophets, and the kings of the whole earth (*basileis tēs oikoumenēs holēs*, verse 14)--a phrase used only once in Revelation--are gathering for Armageddon. According to Rev 17 the beast from the abyss and the ten horns/kings are fighting against the Lamb. In chapter 19 the sea beast together with the kings of the earth (*basileis tēs gēs*, verse 19) make war against the rider on the white horse, the King of kings. However, somehow also the false prophet seems to be involved, because the beast, the false prophet, and "the others" are being judged (Rev 19:20-21).

attack upon her is alluded to in Rev 16:12 under the image of the drying up of the Euphrates river.¹⁵⁵ Rev 18 will concentrate on the downfall of Babylon.¹⁵⁶

a. The Identity of the Horns

It is generally acknowledged that these ten horn/kings are ruling contemporaneously¹⁵⁷ and that the OT allusion is Dan 7:7-8,20,24.¹⁵⁸ From thereon opinions vary. Some identify these kings as Parthian leaders or as rulers of Roman provinces.¹⁵⁹ Aune suggests that these horns are Roman client kings.¹⁶⁰ Osborne follows Aune by also mentioning client kings but relates their battle against Jesus to the great tribulation period and understands them to be the same group as the “kings of the east” of Rev 16:12 which locates them in the future.¹⁶¹ Hughes thinks that the ten horns and “the kings of the whole world” (Rev 16:13-14) are the same group.¹⁶² Thomas claims that “the number ten must be quantitative, not qualitative” referring to a future coalition or confederacy of the kings including their kingdoms under the leadership of the beast. This will be “the final Gentile world empire.”¹⁶³ Others suggest that the number ten is figurative pointing to the “idea of universal plenitude” and to

¹⁵⁵For further discussion of the death of the harlot see Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 956-957; Beale, 883; Stefanovic, 517-518. Osborne, 625, calls the process “an eschatological civil war.” He states: “The ‘hatred’ that the powers of evil have for their followers has already been revealed in the fifth and sixth trumpets, where the demonic locusts torture their followers for five months and then the demonic horsemen kill one-third of humankind. This fits the pattern of demon possession in the Gospels, where the demons seek to torture and kill those they possess (cf. Mark 5:1-20; 9:14-29). Satan and his fallen angels have no love for human beings, who are made in the image of God and are still loved by God. Therefore, by inflicting as much pain and suffering on God’s created beings as they can, Satan and his forces are getting back in some small way at God.”

¹⁵⁶Cf. Osborne, 625.

¹⁵⁷Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 950; Thomas, 300.

¹⁵⁸Cf. Beale, 878; Stefanovic, 516.

¹⁵⁹For different options of interpretation see Beale, 878; Farmer, 116.

¹⁶⁰Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 951.

¹⁶¹Cf. Osborne, 621-622.

¹⁶²Hughes, 186.

¹⁶³Thomas, 300.

completeness.¹⁶⁴ Corsini argues that identifying the horns with Roman vassals is too limited and makes the statement in verse 13 superfluous. The ten horns should include all rulers.¹⁶⁵ Rejecting the preterist view, Kistemaker declares: “These ten horns are ten kings in the service of the evil one; they are united in purpose to do the bidding of the beast, that is, the Antichrist. The text precludes identifying ten kings with subordinate rulers in the Roman empire or with the Parthian governors, because these kings had not yet received a kingdom.”¹⁶⁶

It is not easy to determine whether the number ten is used figuratively or whether it is employed in a literal way. In Dan 7, which furnishes the background for the ten horns in Rev 17, the ten horns of the fourth beast seem to refer to precisely ten kingdoms, because in connection with the appearance of a little horn three of the ten are uprooted. This leaves seven horns only plus the little horn, a power of a somewhat different nature, and may indicate that a quantitative number is implied. In Rev 17 the subdivision of the heads in five that are fallen, one that is, one that is to come, and the eighth also suggests an understanding of the seven as a literal number. However, the horns in Rev 17 are not reduced to seven.¹⁶⁷ Neither are the subdivided. This may allow for a figurative interpretation. Furthermore, the question is whether the ten horns/kings are part of the kings of Rev 17:2 or whether they actually are these very kings who are involved in acts of sexual immorality with harlot Babylon. Over them the harlot rules (Rev 17:18). If the ten kings are identical with the kings of the earth in Rev 17:2 and 18, the number ten should be understood figuratively.

In the Apocalypse the term “king” (*basileus*) occurs in the singular and the plural. In the

¹⁶⁴Beale, 878. Nichol, 7:857, declares: “The nations of the earth, represented by the ten horns, here purpose to unite with the ‘beast’ . . . in forcing the inhabitants of the earth to drink the ‘wine’ of Babylon . . . , that is, to unite the world under her control and to obliterate all who refuse to cooperate . . .”

¹⁶⁵Corsini, 326-327. Mounce, 319, argues: “The ten kings are not the ten emperors of Rome because unlike the Roman emperor, these have received no kingdom as yet. Nor are they the kings of the earth who in 18:9 mourn the fall of Babylon. . . Whatever the immediate historical allusion, the complete fulfillment of the imagery awaits the final curtain of the human drama. Ultimately, the kings are ‘purely eschatological figures representing the totality of the powers of all nations on the earth which are to be made subservient to Antichrist. The number ten is symbolic and indicates completeness. It does not point to ten specific kings nor to ten European kingdoms of a revived Roman empire.”

¹⁶⁶Kistemaker, 474.

¹⁶⁷Stefanovic, 516, when commenting on the ten horns writes: “Seven kings will receive dominion over the world together *with the beast in one hour.*” He does not provide a rationale for reducing the ten to seven apart from pointing to Dan 7 as an allusion.

singular it refers to God the Father who is the “King of the nations” (Rev 15:3), to Jesus who is the “King of kings” (Rev 17:14; 19:16), and to the king of the locusts who is the angel of the abyss and represents Satan (Rev 9:11). In the plural the term “king” occurs most frequently--namely eight times--in the phrase “the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5; 6:15; 17:2,18; 18:3,9; 19:19; 21:24). Twice “kings” are found in enumerations of various people or rulers (Rev 10:11; 19:18). “The kings of the whole world” appear in Rev 16:14. Two verses earlier “the kings from the east” show up (Rev 16:12). Chapter 17 adds the “seven kings” (Rev 17:9) and the “ten kings” (Rev 17:12) who will receive authority “as kings” for one hour (Rev 17:12).

In Rev 17 the term “king” occurs most frequently. The kings of the earth mentioned at the beginning and the end of the chapter form a kind of inclusion (Rev 17:2,18). They also link chapter 17 to chapter 18, because the statement that the kings of the earth have committed adultery with the harlot, found for the first time in Rev 17:2, is repeated in 18:3,9. In addition there are the seven kings (Rev 17:9) and the ten kings. Beale asks:

Why do the kings and multitudes who turn against Babylon in ch. 17 then mourn over her destruction in 18:9ff.? Perhaps the ‘kings’ of 18:9-10 are other rulers not included in the ten kings of ch. 17, and perhaps the ‘merchants’ of 18:11ff. are not included in the multitudes of 17:15. Both groups may have remained loyal to Babylon and then mourned her demise. On the other hand, those mourning in ch. 18 may be the same ones who turned against the whore in ch. 17. They mourn because they now realize that through their destruction of Babylon they have destroyed their own economic base.”¹⁶⁸

The kings in Rev 17 as well as throughout the Apocalypse are powers opposed to God. In Rev 17 they are contrasted with the Lamb, the ultimate King and the King of kings who will overcome them. Whereas the seven kings represent major kingdoms which follow each other chronologically, the ten kings reign simultaneously and stand for political powers opposed to Jesus.

b. Time References

The major activities of the horns as described in Rev 17 will take place during the last events of human history.¹⁶⁹ The ten horns will rule together with the beast for “one hour.” During this time

¹⁶⁸Beale, 883-884. Morris, 205, rejects the view that the ten horns are the same as the kings of the earth.

¹⁶⁹Kistemaker, 475, notes: “We are not told when these kings will receive their power, but the repeated use of the term *one hour* in the next chapter (18:10, 17, 19) suggests that the destructive forces will create havoc in the last

they will wage war against Jesus and will destroy the harlot. The “one hour” of working in a coalition with the scarlet beast (Rev 17:12) occurs also in Rev 18:10,17,19 in connection with the judgment on the city Babylon. An alternate time span of “one day” is mentioned in Rev 18:8. It may very well be that “one hour” and “one day” are used interchangeably in Rev 18.¹⁷⁰ This would indicate that “one hour” is a figurative designation of time. The majority of expositors suggest that the phrase “one hour” denotes a short period of time.¹⁷¹ Morris points to the fact that the shortness of time may be according to God’s concept of shortness of time, not ours.¹⁷² This interpretation still allows for the suddenness of the fall of Babylon.¹⁷³

In the NT The term “hour” (*hōra*) sometimes with prepositions and/or pronouns sometimes without them can have the following meanings: (1) “at once” (Matt 9:22; 15:28; Acts 16:33), (2) “at that time” (Matt 10:19; 18:1; Luke 10:21), (3) “a while” or “a short while” (John 5:35; 2Cor 7:8; 1Thess 2:17; Philem 1:15), (4) “late” (Mark 6:35; 11:11), (5) precisely an hour or during a specific hour (especially with ordinal numbers--Matt 20:3,5,9; Mark 15:25; but also Matt 20:12), (6) an appointed time (especially appointed by God--Matt 24:36,44,50;¹⁷⁴ John 2:4; 5:25; 12:23,27), (7) a (short) period of time (1John 2:18).

In Revelation “hour” occurs ten times. Four out of ten occurrences use the number “one” with the term “hour.” Almost all texts in which “hour” is found contain a context of judgment. Furthermore, in none of them a precise hour of sixty minutes is implied.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, it is preferable

days.”

¹⁷⁰Cf. Nichol, 7:857.

¹⁷¹Cf. Osborne, 622; Farmer, 116; Kistemaker, 475. He points out that “*one hour* should not be understood literally as sixty minutes, for here as in other places in the Apocalypse chronological time is not the issue. Rather, time is a principle that in this text merely means brevity.”

¹⁷²Cf. Morris, 205.

¹⁷³Cf. Osborne, 622. Beale, 879, points to the LXX of Dan 4:17 as the background of Rev 17:12. It is also found in a judgment context.

¹⁷⁴Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 952.

¹⁷⁵Rev 3:3 refers to the hour of Jesus’ judgment and Rev 3:10 to the hour of testing. Rev 9:15 reports that the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released. According to Rev 11:13 “in that hour was a great earthquake.” Rev 14:7 states that the hour of judgment has come and verse 15 that the hour

to take “hour” in Rev 17:12 as a short and undefined period of time.¹⁷⁶

Summary and Conclusion

In this article we have suggested that the Beast of Rev 17 should be understood as Satan.¹⁷⁷ This solves some of the problems associated with other views: Rome does not have to fight Rome. Rather the political powers with Satan as the instigator that initially support Babylon will turn against her. Another problem is also solved, namely that a head does exist, while the beast itself “is not.” In addition the data found in Revelation seem to support the view that the beast represents Satan.

- The beasts in Rev 12, 13, and 17 do not exactly represent the same power. The scarlet beast is best understood as Satan working through political powers. He is active throughout human history but the emphasis of Rev 17 is on the last time of human history.
- The phases of the beast and the subdivision of the heads are not directly parallel. Whereas the phases of the beast represent historical time, the time during the Millennium, and the time after the Millennium, the heads must all be placed in historical time. The sixth head seems to refer to John’s time, that is, the first century A.D. The “was” phase of the beast refers also to historical time.¹⁷⁸ During that time Satan is active through different agencies. The time ends with the second coming of Jesus Christ. In connection with Christ’s second advent and the beginning of the Millennium Satan is bound and confined to the abyss. He enters the phase “is not.” After the Millennium Satan is released from the abyss. He is active as described in Rev 20. As such he is the eighth and of the seven. But he will be judged and annihilated.
- The seven heads of the beast represent kingdoms rather than individual kings. John writing from the perspective of the first century is told that five are fallen, one is, one has not come yet, and that there is an eighth. These kingdoms are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia,

to reap has come. Rev 17:12 and 18:10,17,19 contain the phrase “one hour.” The horns rule for one hour. The destruction of Babylon will happen in one hour.

¹⁷⁶Cf. Nichol, 7:856-857.

¹⁷⁷Corsini, 328, phrased it in this way: “This, the probable meaning of the monster is all that holds up the prostitute: it represents Satan in his guise as ‘lord of the world,’ a lordship which is both physical and spiritual, religious and political.”

¹⁷⁸Beale, 864, notes that “the beast’s existence extends from the beginning of history to its end . . .”

Greece, Rome, and the Papacy. The eighth is the beast itself, Satan.

- The horns represent political powers at the end of human history. They work together with the beast out of the abyss in waging war against Jesus Christ and destroying harlot Babylon. Their activity is limited to a relatively short period of time. The heads are not mentioned as involved in the final battle against Jesus and the harlot. This makes sense for two reasons. First, the heads are empires spanning human history and not end time kingdoms. They have passed away with the exception of the seventh. Second, in case the heads were immersed in this final battle, the power behind the seventh head would fight itself, because it is also part of Babylon.

The main suggestion, namely that the beast of Rev 17 represents Satan makes sense for the following reasons:

- In Revelation the abyss is distinguished from the sea and is consistently linked to Satan. It is best to understand the beast of Rev 17 as Satan.
- The beast of Rev 17 has a strong affinity to the dragon of Rev 12. In both passages it is firmly opposed to Jesus and fights a war/wars against him.
- It is hardly conceivable that the beast is one of the powers represented by the heads or the harlot, for instance, the Papacy. It is also difficult to see how it would fight itself. It is more consistent to understand the scarlet beast as Satan.
- Neither is the beast of Rev 17 further explained in chapter 17 in the sense that it is identified with another symbol or reality, nor is the judgment on it directly spelled out in Rev 17. Since John frequently introduces a concept and develops it later,¹⁷⁹ we should expect a fuller description of the beast's judgment in another place in the Apocalypse. This is actually found in Rev 20.
- Satan is a parody of God, while the sea beast is a parody of Jesus, and the beast from the earth is a parody of the Holy Spirit. The beast from the abyss is primarily an imitation of God the Father and should not be confused with another beast.

¹⁷⁹For instance, elements of the promises to the overcomers found in Rev 2 and 3 are mentioned again at the end of the book. The Millennium may be hinted at in the seventh seal. Babylon is introduced by name in Rev 14:8 but fully portrayed in Rev 17 and 18 only. The sixth and seventh plagues are more comprehensively described in Rev 17 and 18. The bride of the Lamb occurs for the first time in Rev 19. A fuller description follows in Rev 21.

- The sea beast is dependent on the dragon, and the beast from the earth is dependent on the sea beast. In the case of the scarlet beast no such dependence is shown. It resembles the dragon.
- In Rev 12 and 17 both the dragon and the beast stand in a certain relationship to a church or a group of religious believers, whether faithful or apostate. In both cases the dragon and the scarlet beast attempt to destroy them. In Rev 17 the beast is more successful than the dragon is in Rev 12. A reason is that the apostate church does not enjoy divine protection as does the true church of God.
- The beast of Rev 17 is an example of perfect opposition to God and Jesus. In the ultimate sense this applies to Satan only.
- Both Rev 12 and Rev 17 refer to the desert and seem to depict a similar situation with similar or identical personnel. Corsini notes:

. . . the scene of ch. 17 takes place in the desert and has as its protagonists the beast and the prostitute. All this is clearly taking up what we saw in ch. 12 concerning the women who fled into the desert, followed by the dragon. The two situations correspond, but now there is a serious difference. In the first case, the woman feared and fled from the dragon, while in the second she has a relationship and even an intimacy with him . . . The fact that the woman is here presented under the aspect of a prostitute indicates that, evidently, her spiritual attitude has changed: she no longer fears her old adversary, but now has such a closeness to him that she believes that she can overcome him and make him subject to her desires. This is a vain hope, as this monstrous union finishes with the beast's destruction of the prostitute.¹⁸⁰
- We have noted that in Rev 17 two different battles are alluded to. "In 17:14, the beast and its allies make war on the Lamb and are conquered by him, and in 17:16, the beast and its allies attack the woman and desert her."¹⁸¹ That there are these two battles of a different nature, one directed vertically and the other horizontally, the one waged against divinity, the other waged against a human system, which itself is in opposition to God, makes the interpretation of the beast as Satan the better option.

Although Rev 17 depicts evil powers which are quite active, God is still in control. He brings judgment on the enemies of his people and delivers his saints from all perplexities and persecutions.

¹⁸⁰Corsini, 331.




¹⁸¹Murphy, 364.

The chapter contains comfort for God's people. On the other hand, "the idea of imminence is expressed."¹⁸² It is not long, and the Lord will come and intervene. "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful" (Rev 17:14).

¹⁸²Beale, 871.

Appendix

THE BEAST OF REV 17 ¹⁸³

Historical Era		
<i>“WAS”</i>		1 st Head
		2 nd Head
		3 rd Head
		4 th Head
		5 th Head
“One Is”		6 th Head John’s Time
“One Is Not Yet Come”		7 th Head 10 Horns Concurrent
Eschatological Era		
<i>“IS NOT”</i>		“Bottomless Pit”/Abyss (Millennium)
<i>“WILL COME”</i>		8 th Head (after Millennium)
<i>“GOES TO DESTRUCTION”</i>		“Perdition” (after Millennium)

¹⁸³The following diagram was adapted from Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 56.