

## THE BEAST OF REVELATION 17: A SUGGESTION (PART I)

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*This article focuses on the beast of Rev 17 on which the harlot Babylon rides. It attempts to contribute to the ongoing debate and seeks to identify the beast. The first part of the two-part article published here provides an introduction to the discussion and deals with the literary context of Rev 17, its time frame, and its structure. It argues that the scarlet beast is a parody of God. Although it has shared elements with the sea beast, it is not necessarily identical with the sea beast of Rev 13. The beast on which Babylon sits comes out of the abyss. Since the abyss seems to be connected with Satan throughout the Book of Revelation, it is suggested the scarlet beast be identified as Satan working through political powers.*

*Key Words: Revelation, beast, Rev 17, scarlet beast, Satan, Babylon, seven heads, ten horns*

### 1. Introduction

Revelation 17 is one of the most complicated chapters of the NT and has been subjected to 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 was and is not and will come.’” Further information on the beast is given in the rest of Rev 17.

While this article cannot pretend to solve all the riddles, it will at least narrow the number of possible interpretations. The article is divided into two parts. The first half provides an introduction to the discussion, deals with context, time frame, and structure of Rev 17 and introduces the interpretation of the scarlet beast.

## 2. 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 a later time in which John is placed 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?<sup>1</sup> (4) How should the heads be interpreted?

Preterist interpreters of Revelation see in the harlot, the beast, and the seven mountains of Rev 17:9, which are the seven heads of the beast, a reference to Rome.<sup>2</sup> Some of them understand the seven heads as seven emperors of the first century A.D.<sup>3</sup> Since there is hardly a way to decide which of the more than ten Roman emperors of the first century are meant,<sup>4</sup> other scholars suggest a symbolic approach. Mounce holds: “The most satisfactory explanation of the seven kings is that the number seven is symbolic

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

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 487, 491, 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.” Cf. Ronald L. Farmer, *Revelation* (Chalice Commentaries for Today; St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 144; and Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993), 171, on the heads.

<sup>3</sup> Compare R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC; 2 vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 2:69; Harrington, *Revelation*, 172; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 492.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the problems involved see, David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC 52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 946–48; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 872–74; Farmer, *Revelation*, 114–16; Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 471–72; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 315–17; and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 617–19.

and stands for the power of the Roman Empire as a historic whole."<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

Kistemaker is not completely satisfied with the preterist approach. Talking about the harlot 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."<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup>

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 ...."<sup>10</sup> 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

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

<sup>6</sup> Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 325. See also pages 322–24. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 469, when trying to identify the beast of Rev 17 seems also to vacillate between the first beast of Rev 13 and Satan. Jon Paulien, "Revelation 17 and the Papacy," in *Endtime Issues Newsletter* No. 131: 27. [Cited 25 March 2007] Online: [www.biblicalperspectives.com](http://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.

<sup>7</sup> Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 494.

<sup>8</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 460.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 469, 472.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 254.

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."<sup>11</sup> Obviously, both presume a secret rapture<sup>12</sup> based on the gap theory, which separates the seventieth 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 final seventieth 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."<sup>13</sup>

Like the preterists, historicists oftentimes link the beast of Rev 17 with the sea beast of Rev 13.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> "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.'"<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 293, 297.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Wall, *Revelation* (NIBCNT; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 202. On pages 207–8 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."

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 402–4. Although Stefanovic may not be a historicist in the strictest sense of the word, he also uses among others the historicist approach to the interpretation of the Apocalypse (*ibid.*, 12).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (7 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1957), 7:853.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Edwin Reynolds, "The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 103.

When it comes to the seven heads, historicists tend to agree that they represent empires rather than individual kings. However, different starting points are 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.<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Maxwell and Doukhan suggest that the heads are Babylon, Persia, Greece, pagan Rome, Christian Rome, wounded Christian Rome, and revived Christian Rome/the reinstated church.<sup>19</sup> Such an approach, that is starting with Babylon, hardly allows 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 13<sup>20</sup> and places the affliction of the wound in the year A.D. 1798.

Another proposal, put forth for instance by Strand, Stefanovic, and Paulien, considers the five heads that are fallen to be the world empires Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, the sixth head as pagan Rome and the seventh as papal Rome.<sup>21</sup> 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 13:11).<sup>22</sup>

According to Doukhan, "the 10 kings represent the last political world powers. Having already encountered them in Rev 16 in the context of Ar-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:854–55.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation For You and Your Family*, Vol 2 (Boise: Pacific Press, 1985), 471–75; and Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2002), 161–63.

<sup>20</sup> Richard 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."

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kenneth A. Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?" in *Symposium on Revelation. Book 2* (Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 7; ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 191; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 512; Paulien, "Revelation 17 and the Papacy," 37; Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:854–56.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Reynolds, "The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17," 104–6.

magaddon (Rev 16:12), we shall meet them again in chapter 18 in which they fight the last battle of Armageddon (Rev 18:9)."<sup>23</sup>

### 3. 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 sevens 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 or elements of nature being affected the plagues seem to have a universal scope. The sixth plague describes the drying up of the river Euphrates (the river of Babylon), the coming of the kings from the east (which may point to Jesus and his heavenly host),<sup>24</sup> and Armageddon. The seventh plague depicts the judgment on Babylon and the time when it is 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 angels with a bowl 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 into 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 angels with a bowl appears. In a more detailed manner he introduces John to the bride of the lamb (Rev 21:9–22:6), the New Jerusalem mentioned already in Rev 19 and further explained in

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 164. For further discussions on the horns see below.

<sup>24</sup> The 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 (מָשִׁיחַ [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 the rider on the white horse followed by the armies of heaven successfully waging war against evil powers—a more detailed description of Armageddon. According to Matt 24:27 the coming of Jesus is compared to lightning flashing from east to west. Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:844.

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.<sup>25</sup>

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."<sup>26</sup>

Rev 17:3, 8–12 must be interpreted in this end-time context of judgment. It is from the perspective of the judgment on Babylon, the judgment under the sixth and seventh plagues 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? Revelation 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.<sup>27</sup> A relation between the satanic trinity and Babylon is also found in the plagues. In the sixth plague the river Euphrates, 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).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the list of similarities and differences provided by Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 131–32.

<sup>26</sup> Reynolds, "The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17," 93–94; cf. Kenneth A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions," in *Symposium on Revelation. Book 1* (Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6; ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 35, 48–49.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2002), 132–33; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 448, 497. Adventists have often associated the dragon with demonic-spiritualistic elements or paganism, the Papacy, and apostate Protestantism. Cf. Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (2nd rev. ed.; 2 vols.; Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1996), 1:148–50.

## 4. 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:<sup>28</sup>

1. Narrative: John is approached by one of the angels with a bowl (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*

*Table 1: The Structure of Rev 17*

In apocalyptic literature a vision is often followed by an explanation.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> The distinction between visions and angelic speeches is important. In a vision a prophet may move freely in time and location.<sup>31</sup> 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 of the 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

<sup>28</sup> For a syntactical diagram of Rev 17 see Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4–11* (AUSDDS 21; Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1996), 621–24.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Dan 7:1–15 and 7:16–28 or Rev 1:16 and 1:20.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 243.

<sup>31</sup> See Rev 4:1 where John enters heaven.



lamb, and in their battle against the harlot which is her judgment. Thus, they provide additional information not contained in either 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 (17:1, 15), the dependence on her of the kings (17:2, 18; 18:3, 9–10), the merchants (18:3, 11–15), and the seafarers (18:17–19), her royal claims (18:7; 17:18) as well as her tremendous wealth and luxury (17:4; 18:3, 7, 9, 15, 17, 19) indeed justify calling 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 in Rev 17 on the horns and the beast than on the heads. The heads are not directly mentioned as being involved in the final battle, which may indicate that the heads are related more 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 distinction 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 the future activities of the horns. These horns will come to power in the future only, collaborating with the beast "for one hour."<sup>32</sup>

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

<sup>32</sup> Verse 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 λαμβάνουσιν "they receive" 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, NRSV, and others. A similar construction with οὔπω 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.

*Second Speech of the Angel (7–14):*

## Introduction (7)

## a. The beast (8–9a)

*Which you have seen*

—

## b. The heads (9b–11)

—

The heads are seven mountains and seven kings

## c. The horns (12–14)

*Which you have seen*

The horns are ten kings

*Third Speech of the angel (15–18):*

## a. The waters (15)

*Which you have seen*

The waters are peoples, multitudes, etc.

## b. The ten horns and the beast (16–17)

*Which you have seen*

—

## c. The harlot (18)

*Which you have seen*

The harlot is the great city

Table 2: *The Second and the Third Angelic Speeches*

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

In effect then, the harlot, the waters, the heads, and the horns are identified. In each case the same phrase is used.<sup>33</sup> 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 the beast and horns, in which their 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> This is the phrase “The heads/horns/waters/harlot are/is....”

<sup>34</sup> While 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 characterization of the heads. The seven heads are seven mountains. They are also seven kings.

## 5. 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 the beast on which she sits. In addition, sometimes one or more of the heads are even identified with Rome.<sup>35</sup> 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 the part of the beast, the prostitute or the heads. On the contrary, each entity seems to be vigorous and active in pursuing their goals once they are 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."<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

### 5.1. The Beast Out of the Abyss

#### 5.1.1. *A Parody of God*

The description of the beast in Rev 17:8b as "was, and is not, and will come" reminds us of God the Father, who is called "He who was and who is and who is to come" (Rev 4:8, cf. 1:4, 8).<sup>38</sup> It portrays the beast of Rev 17 as a counterfeit, parody, and opponent of God.<sup>39</sup> 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),

<sup>35</sup> See the above discussion concerning the different interpretations.

<sup>36</sup> Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 322.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:851.

<sup>38</sup> A 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, either God will have come to live with redeemed humanity or his coming is imminent.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 435–36; Farmer, *Revelation*, 114; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 314.

the words "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.<sup>40</sup>

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..."<sup>41</sup> 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 stage of history, while God remains forever and ever carrying out his plans. At the end Christ and his followers will triumph.

### *5.1.2. The Beasts and the Dragon in Rev 12, 13, and 17*

Another issue is the resemblance between the beasts of Rev 13 and 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 (13:1; 17:7). (2) The sea beast has a "mouth speaking... blasphemies" (13:5; cf. verses 1 and 6), while the other beast is "full of blasphemous names" (17:3). (3) Both are powers opposed to God/Jesus and the followers of Christ (13:6-8; 17:14). (4) Both are called

<sup>40</sup> The 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 (13:3). (2) Jesus has come to life (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 (2:27; 3:21). The dragon gives his throne to the sea beast (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 (12:10). The dragon gives his power and authority to the beast (13:4). (5) Jesus is worshiped by heavenly beings and by the entire creation (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* (BWANT 7/16; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995), 33; and Rodríguez, *Future Glory*, 106.

<sup>41</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 469.

“beasts.” (5) In both instances people wonder (13:3; 17:7). However, while “the whole earth” was amazed at the sea beast, it was John who wondered at the scarlet beast. The additional similarity produced through the word ὧδε is weak, because the usage in Rev 17:9 differs from the phrase ὧδε ἐστὶν in Rev 13:10, 18 and 14:12.<sup>42</sup>

Although they share some common elements, there are also differences: (1) The sea beast has crowns on its horns (13:1), the beast of Rev 17 has no crowns.<sup>43</sup> (2) The color of the sea beast is not mentioned, but the other beast’s color is scarlet (17:3). (3) The sea beast comes out of the sea (13:1) but the beast, on which Babylon rides, comes out of the abyss (17:8), which is not necessarily the same location. (4) Time elements are mentioned with both beasts. However, they differ substantially.<sup>44</sup> (5) The sea beast receives its power from the dragon and is therefore dependent 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.<sup>45</sup> This suggests that 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 (12:3; 17:7); (2) a similar color (12:3; 17:3);<sup>46</sup> (3) opposition specifically to Jesus—the male child and Michael<sup>47</sup> of

<sup>42</sup> In addition, Rev 13:18 is closer to Rev 17:9 than 13:10 is, because it contains both ὧδε and σφραγίς.

<sup>43</sup> The 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. Strand, “The Seven Heads,” 183–84.

<sup>44</sup> The 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.

<sup>45</sup> See the above discussion including footnote 40.

<sup>46</sup> Reynolds, “The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17,” 102, states that the difference of color between dragon and beast “is a difference only in hue, not in basic color.” Wall, *Revelation*, 206, writes: “...the scarlet beast, is linked by its red color to the ‘enormous red dragon’ (12:3), Satan...”

<sup>47</sup> Although 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 (YHWH) 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 1 Thess 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

Rev 12, and the King of kings in Rev 17—but also to his people (12:4–17; 17:14); (4) contact with a woman—the pure woman and the harlot—which was/will be harassed and, in the case of the harlot, will be killed after an initial alliance; and (5) a reference to the desert (12:6, 14; 17:3).

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 only a later phase of the beast's career. Originally, it is stated just 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 θηρίον "beast" as the scarlet beast is (Rev 17:3).<sup>48</sup>

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."<sup>49</sup> However, it seems 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 sea beast and scarlet beast. We now turn to the abyss.

### *5.1.3. 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."<sup>50</sup> (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

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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." Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 4:860. Compare also in more detail Michael Onyedikachi Akpa, "The Identity and Role of Michael in the Narrative of the War in Heaven: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Revelation 12:7–12" (Ph.D. diss., Theological Seminary, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> This issue will be discussed later in this study.

<sup>49</sup> Paulien, "Revelation 17 and the Papacy," 27.

<sup>50</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 526. Later, on the same page, he calls these beings "demons" only.

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 *מְהוֹמָה*, rendered as the deep, the waters of the deep or the flood<sup>51</sup> is almost always translated with the Greek term *ἄβυσσος*. This term is found 37 times in the canonical books of the LXX.<sup>52</sup> The deep occurs for the first time 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 [*ύδατος*]." "'Over the surface of the deep' parallels 'over the surface of the water' 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. 6–10)."<sup>53</sup> After the separation sea [*θάλασσα*] and earth [*γη*] become 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) or is described as the "depths of the earth" (Ps 70:20; LXX)<sup>54</sup> from which the Psalmist hopes to be brought up again. Ps 148:7 associates dragons<sup>55</sup> and all *ἄβυσσοι*.

When it comes to the NT a shift of meaning occurs. *ἄβυσσος* 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

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Claus Westermann, "*מְהוֹמָה* *ṭhôm* flood," *TLOT*, 1412–13.

<sup>52</sup> This includes Dan 3:55 which is an addition to the MT text.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 133.

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

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

meaning of תהום and ἄβυσσος to the depths of the earth as the prison of spirits and as the world of the dead....<sup>56</sup> 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 (i.e., eleven times). The sea is not specifically linked to the abyss in the NT or in the Book of Revelation.<sup>57</sup>

### 5.1.3.1. Revelation 9:1–2

The fallen star (ἀστὴρ) 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”<sup>58</sup> or the angel mentioned in Rev 20:1,<sup>59</sup> because it is held that (1) “fallen” can mean “descended;” (2) “this would be the only place in Revelation where God used an evil angel to execute his will;”<sup>60</sup> and (3) there is a close parallel to the positive angel in Rev 20:1–3. The fallen star has also been understood as a negative power, predominantly as Satan.<sup>61</sup> If the star is seen in a positive way it is distinguished from the angel of the abyss in 9:11. 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

<sup>56</sup> Westermann, “תהום *ṭhôm* flood,” 1414. Cf. J. Jeremias, “ἄβυσσος,” TDNT 1:9–10.

<sup>57</sup> In 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 [2\*]; 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 on the new earth there will no longer be sea (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 references 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, it is better to keep the two terms separate.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22, 27; cf. Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 525; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 129; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation* (CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 114; Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 225.

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

<sup>60</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 362.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 491–92; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 285; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 300, 302; Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 159.



to be general agreement that the abyss is the dwelling place, realm or place of detention of demons,<sup>62</sup> "the preliminary place of incarceration for fallen angels."<sup>63</sup>

A number of OT and NT texts, which point to the concept of stars and the process of falling or the state of having been fallen, 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.<sup>64</sup> The Babylonian king is addressed with language that sets him apart "from ordinary mortals" but, according to Watts, the poem "is a simile to picture the fall and disgrace of the tyrant" and "not specifically tailored for the king of Babylon."<sup>65</sup> The NT uses concepts found in this verse to point to Satan, as do church fathers.<sup>66</sup> Kaiser points to Luke 10:18; 2 Cor 11:14, and Rev 20,<sup>67</sup> and Keil suggests 2 Thess 2:4.<sup>68</sup> 2 Cor 11:14 reports that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. According to Luke 10:18 Jesus saw Satan falling from heaven and 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."<sup>69</sup> Witherington furnishes additional biblical texts that indirectly or directly describe fallen angels. They include Isa 24:21–22; 1 Pet 3:19–20; 2 Pet 2:4; and Jude 1:6.<sup>70</sup> He states: "For our purposes, it is only necessary to

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Walwood, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 159; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 493; Osborne, *Revelation*, 363.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> The 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, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 4:170.

<sup>65</sup> John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco: Word, 1985), 210, 212.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:441.

<sup>67</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja Kapitel 1–12* (ATD 17; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 36.

<sup>68</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 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."

<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 6:105.

<sup>70</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (The New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151–52.

say that the powers and principalities and indeed Satan himself were believed to inhabit the realm between heaven and earth."<sup>71</sup>

Fallen stars as demons or Satan are found in extra-canonical literature, e.g., in *1 En.* 86; 88; 90:24 and *T.Sol.* 20:14–17. In *1 Enoch*, the abyss occurs in connection with fallen stars (*1 En.* 90:24). An allusion to fallen stars may be found in *1 En.* 10:4–6. Although the context differs from that of Revelation, the concept that these fallen stars are evil powers which have to undergo judgment is 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 in the same direction, we might assume that stars 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 πίπτω "to fall" used in the Apocalypse? The verb occurs 23 times in Revelation. Nine times it refers to falling down and worshipping God or mistakenly worship an angel (*Rev* 1:17; 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4, 10; 22:8), having positive connotations when the worship is directed toward God. In addition to worship, the term is associated with the fall of stars (*Rev* 6:13; 8:10 [2×]; 9:1), mountains (*Rev* 6:16), the sun and heat (*Rev* 7:16), cities (*Rev* 11:13; 16:19), Babylon (*Rev* 14:8 [2×]; 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 its first love. Obviously in Revelation the term has negative connotations and is found in judgment contexts when the issue is not associated with worship. Consequently, "having fallen" in *Rev* 9:1 should also be understood as a judgment setting.<sup>72</sup>

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

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>72</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 492, clearly distinguishes between καταβαίνω and πίπτω stating: "Commentators have not adduced one example where a falling star metaphor is applied to a good angel."

term ἐδόθη “it was given” in Rev 9:1, an aorist passive of the verb δίδωμι “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 martyrs under the altar (Rev 6:11), God’s angel in Rev 8:3 or 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 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.<sup>73</sup>

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.”<sup>74</sup>

In Rev 9:1 we hear about only one fallen star which, according to Rev 8:10, is a great star<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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.

### *5.1.3.2. Revelation 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 Ἀβαδδὼν / Ἀπολλύων or de-

<sup>73</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 285.

<sup>74</sup> Farmer, *Revelation*, 83–84. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Harper’s New Testament Commentaries; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 117–18.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 292–93; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 175, 324.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 492; Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 179.

stroyer. The majority of the expositors interpret this angel as Satan<sup>77</sup> or one of his sub-leaders.<sup>78</sup> Others suggest the possibility of an allusion to the god Apollo in this verse.<sup>79</sup> Still others propose that this king represents the emperor of Rome.<sup>80</sup>

The king and angel of the abyss is called Ἀβαδδὼν and Ἀπολλύων. Although the terms are quite similar, they are not completely interchangeable.<sup>81</sup> The Hebrew term Ἀβαδδὼν appears seven times in Scripture, while the Greek Ἀπολλύων is found in Rev 9:11 only. Ἀβαδδὼν is frequently associated with death, ἥϊσψ, and the grave (Job 26:6; 28:22; Ps 88:11; Prov 15:11; 27:20).<sup>82</sup> In Revelation ἄδης, the Greek equivalent of ἥϊσψ, 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 no longer exist. 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).

A strong possibility is that Ἀπολλύων is derived from the noun ἀπώλεια “destruction.” The beast of Rev 17, which will wage war against the Lamb (Rev 17:14) and destroy the harlot (Rev 17:16), will “go to destruction.” In other words, a great reversal will take place. In 2 Thess 2:3 “the

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation*, 111; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 291–92; Osborne, *Revelation*, 373; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 305.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 38–39; Smalley, *The Revelation of John*, 233.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Roloff, *Revelation*, 115; Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984), 195; Witherington, *Revelation*, 134. Leon Morris, *Revelation* (TNTC; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 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.”

<sup>80</sup> Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* (The New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 162–63. Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation*, 111, suggests that the terms are synonymous.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 162.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 534. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 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, *The Apocalypse*, 180, observes: “There is a clear link between these two names [Ἀβαδδὼν and Ἀπολλύων], 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.”

man of lawlessness" and "son of destruction" seems to be Satan and a power that he uses.<sup>83</sup> 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 and the literary structure of the fifth trumpet<sup>84</sup> support the interpretation of the fallen star as the angel of the abyss.<sup>85</sup> As we have seen, stars stand for angels in Revelation. The fallen star 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 that opened the shaft of the abyss and released the demonic army.<sup>86</sup> 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.

### 5.1.3.3. *Revelation 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."<sup>87</sup> Obviously it is the same beast as the one described in Rev 17.<sup>88</sup> 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 activity (Rev 13:3, 5).<sup>89</sup> The beast out of the earth begins its deceptive activity around the

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:271; Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (SP 11; Collegeville: 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).

<sup>84</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 362, mentions a possible *inclusio*.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. the structure suggested by Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4–11*, 342–43; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 305.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 503.

<sup>87</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 156–57. Cf. Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation*, 125; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 350.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Kistemaker, *The Apocalypse*, 332; Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, 358.

<sup>89</sup> The 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* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Daniel & Revelation Committee Series 6; Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute General, Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 354–59.

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 1,260 days (Rev 11:3), rather it inflicts such a wound on the two witnesses.<sup>90</sup>

The two witnesses of Rev 11 should be understood as the Scriptures of the OT and NT<sup>91</sup> which historically suffered during the French Revolution.<sup>92</sup> The beast of Rev 11 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 a person other 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."<sup>93</sup>

#### *5.1.3.4. Revelation 20:1-3*

Rev 20 is another difficult text in Revelation. Scholars have followed different systems of interpretation. Amillennialists<sup>94</sup> suggest that Rev 12:7-12 and Rev 20:1-3 with their fourfold mention 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.<sup>95</sup> Premillennialists point out: (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 ch. 13), while in Rev 20 Satan is cast into the abyss

<sup>90</sup> Seventh-day Adventists take the 42 months as 1260 years reaching from A.D. 538-1798. Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:809.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Kenneth A. Strand, "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12," *AUSS* 19 (1981): 127-35; idem, "The Two Olive Trees of Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11," *AUSS* 20 (1982): 257-61; Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13.2 (2002): 30-45.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:802-3.

<sup>93</sup> Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 200.

<sup>94</sup> Amillennialism 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* (ed. Raoul Dederen; Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2000), 935-42, furnishes a brief description and history of amillennialism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Farmer, *Revelation*, 123, 125; Smalley, *The Revelation of John*, 504-5.

and is unable to deceive humanity for a thousand years.<sup>96</sup> (3) The Jewish background of Rev 20 suggests that the events described there will take place at the end of human history only.<sup>97</sup>

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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

### 5.1.3.5. 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

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Alan Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelinein; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:581; Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997), 446–47; Witherington, *Revelation*, 245; Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (repr., Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1984), 592.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Witherington, *Revelation*, 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).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation*, 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 (209–11).

<sup>99</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 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 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, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 554–55, points to parallels between Rev 20 and other parts of Revelation and apart from Rev 12–13 also mentions Rev 17.

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.<sup>100</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The depiction of the scarlet beast in Rev 17 raises many questions. This study has introduced the issues under discussion as well as various approaches for solving them. Although it seems that a historicist reading as the overall approach to Revelation is the preferable method,<sup>101</sup> the context of Rev 17 is eschatological in nature. It is the end-time context of judgment. The structure of Rev 17 shows an alternation between angelic speeches and visions. The emphasis is on the beast and the horns which will destroy the harlot.

The interpretation of the beast has so far shown that it is a parody of God. Although it shares common elements with the sea beast, its differences indicate that it can be interpreted as a power not identical with the sea beast. The beast comes out of the abyss. Since the abyss is connected with Satan, it seems best to identify the scarlet beast as Satan working through political systems.

Part two of this article will focus on the phases and various characteristics of the beast. It will also briefly discuss the heads and the horns.

<sup>100</sup> Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 249–50, 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.”

<sup>101</sup> See Rev 12–14 as the paradigm, reaching from the birth of the Messiah to the Second Coming of Jesus.