

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

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*The first part of the article has attempted to lay a foundation for the interpretation of the scarlet beast of Rev 17. It has also studied the connection of the sea beast with the abyss and has seen similarities and differences between the sea beast of Rev 13 and the scarlet beast. Its affinity to the abyss suggests that the scarlet beast is Satan working through political powers. The second part of the article studies the phases of the sea beast, looks at its characteristics and deals with the seven heads and the ten horns of the beast. It suggests that the phases of the scarlet beast and the subdivisions of the heads are not parallel. The heads begin with the Egyptian empire. From the “is not” phase onward, the phases of the scarlet beast represent Satan’s fate in connection with the Millennium (Rev 20). The horns represent political powers at the end of human history.*

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

### 1. Introduction

Revelation’s mysterious scarlet beast has already been discussed in the first part of this article.<sup>1</sup> The close connection between the beast and the abyss as well as it being a parody of God suggests that it represents Satan. But how should we understand the descriptions of its phases? How does the beast relate to its seven heads? Who are they and who is the eighth head? How should one interpret the ten horns, and what is the time frame for their specific activity? These are some questions that will be dealt with in this part of the article. A conclusion will summarize the results.

### 2. The Scarlet Beast

#### 2.1. 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.

<sup>1</sup> Ekkehardt Müller, “The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion (Part I),” *JAAS* 10 (2007): 27–50.

(1)	<u>It was</u>	AND IS NOT	<i>and is about to come up out of the abyss</i>	AND GOES TO DESTRUCTION
(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>	AND GOES TO DESTRUCTION

Table 1: The Phases of the Beast

A major question, when considering the 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 in the first century A.D., our present situation or the future?

Preterist expositors relate the “is not” state to the first century and sometimes connect it to the *Nero redivivus* myth.<sup>2</sup> 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 explanation to help in understanding the prophecy.”<sup>3</sup> 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).”<sup>4</sup> This quotation not only contains 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.<sup>5</sup>

We suggest, for the following reasons, that 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 16:15; 17:11–13). Furthermore, the phrase “it goes to destruction”

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 491.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 293.

<sup>4</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 469.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

in the very same sentence is also used in the present tense, although it refers to the end of the beast.<sup>6</sup>

(2) More importantly, however, 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 plagues (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 or the persecution of the saints. It only mentions in passing that the harlot is drunk with their blood. The focus is on one of the angels with a bowl showing 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

(3) Rev 4 through 14 contains recapitulation.<sup>9</sup> 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 plagues, 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 be-

<sup>6</sup> The following chart shows that, after the initial imperfect, only present tenses are used in Greek, although μέλλω with the 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:

<i>The beast... was</i>	<i>and is not</i>	<i>and will come up out of the abyss</i>	<i>and goes to destruction</i>
Τὸ θηρίον... ἦν	καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν	καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου	καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει
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.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 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 its 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.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 54–55.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ekkehardt Mueller, “Recapitulation in Revelation 4–11,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9.1–2 (1998): 260–77.

falling him and his armies furnishes a sort of recapitulation"<sup>10</sup> 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 true also of 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.

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 whether the Book of Revelation explains this incident and, if so, how. In Revelation events and actions are being introduced that are later explained in more detail. 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).<sup>11</sup>

These "repetitive scenes" are, however, not just parallels, but 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.<sup>12</sup> We mentioned earlier that in Rev 17 the heads, horns, waters, and the harlot were further explained

<sup>10</sup> Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 532.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 49.

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 in part the same language<sup>13</sup> 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 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 only at the very end of time. 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.</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>
<b>Historical Time</b>	<b>In connection with the second coming</b>	<b>After the Millennium</b>	<b>After the Millennium</b>

*Table 2: The Phases of the Beast and Rev 20*

It has been objected that the dragon of Rev 20 is not called θηρίον "beast" 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the abyss appears in both cases. In Rev 17:1 and 20:4 the same term κρίμα designates the judgment, whereas Rev 18 and 19 also use the term κρίσις, 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.

<sup>14</sup> Compare 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).

Normally in the OT and the NT the term "beast" does not function as a broad term for 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'."<sup>15</sup> In Acts 28:4 Paul was bitten by a "snake." He shook off the "beast." Although another word for snake is used in Acts (ἔχιδνα) rather than the one used in Rev 12 (ὄφις), 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 [2×], 14 [2×], 15 [3×], 17, 18; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2, 10, 13; 19:19, 20 [2×]; 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. Undoubtedly, 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 to be this beast, as well as the angel of the abyss, the king of the locusts, the Ἀβαδδών, and Ἀπολλύων of Rev 9:11.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2. 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; 2 Chron 3:14).<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup> 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

<sup>15</sup> Werner Forester, "θηρίον," *TDNT* 3:133.

<sup>16</sup> Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (7 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1957), 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."

<sup>17</sup> Margaret 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; be-decked with gold and jewels and pearls." She is a parody of divine realities. This is also true for the beast.

<sup>18</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 464.

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."<sup>19</sup> Nichol describes it as pointing to "the epitome of evil."<sup>20</sup>

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 is completely covered with blasphemous names,<sup>21</sup> suggesting some type of intensification. The noun βλασφημία describes slander (Matt 15:19; Eph 4:31; Rev 2:9). It was also used by Jesus' adversaries who charged him with 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 Satan best.<sup>22</sup> Prigent, talking about "perfect opposition" to the true God by the beast that was, is not, and will come out of the abyss, and goes to destruction, connects it to the Roman Empire.<sup>23</sup> However, "perfect opposition" is most clearly seen in God's main adversary, Satan, with whom Michael had to engage in 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 controls the beast.<sup>24</sup> 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 and destroy 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 (1 Pet 5:8). Satan 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 to observe 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

<sup>19</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 507.

<sup>20</sup> Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:851.

<sup>21</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 464.

<sup>22</sup> Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488, sees the difference between Rev 13:1 and 17:3. He also understands blasphemy as a claim to divinity. However, he takes Rev 17:4 as "an allusion to the cult of the emperors."

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 507.

ones in which θαυμάζω 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 are amazed when they see the resurgence of the scarlet beast.<sup>25</sup> The last phase of the beast, namely going to destruction, is left out at the end of verse 7 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 θαυμάζω 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, and the resurgence of the scarlet beast. In Revelation θαυμάζω 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.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the sea beast makes war against the saints, the scarlet beast makes war against harlot Babylon, which obviously includes the sea beast.

### 3. The Seven Heads

#### 3.1. 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,<sup>27</sup> this identification is far from certain. Barker, for instance, holds that "seven mountains were a feature of the mythic geography of Jerusalem."<sup>28</sup> Since

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 435, suggests that θαυμάζω in verse 8 should be understood as admiration, not "astonished perplexity" as in verses 6–7. Robert Wall, *Revelation* (NIBCNT; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 207, states: "Perhaps the greater irony is that the inhabitants of earth, whose sinfulness refuses God's grace and shame, continue to be fascinated by evil power, which will ultimately destroy them."

<sup>26</sup> In 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.

<sup>27</sup> See the discussion at the beginning of this study.

<sup>28</sup> Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 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)."

the term "mountain" is a symbol as much as "head" is and represents "kings," we should not look for literal mountains but "should look for the scriptural usage of the term 'mountain' in cases where the term is employed as a symbol."<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the seven mountains do not point to Rome but to world powers "that have their place in history."<sup>31</sup> 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)."<sup>32</sup> Likewise

<sup>29</sup> 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), 186; cf. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 470–71.

<sup>30</sup> (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 in 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, as political powers, they initially work together and, in one way or another, support the harlot. Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 848, who distinguishes between the multitudes and the beast.

<sup>31</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 471.

<sup>32</sup> Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 285. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 868, shows that "in the Apocalypse it [the Greek term ὄρος] always means 'mountain' and is used

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).<sup>33</sup> Although in Dan 2:37–38 king 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.

### 3.2. 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 just as the sixth head (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:<sup>34</sup>

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

Table 3: Attempt to Associate the Phases of the Beast with the Division of the Heads

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

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."

<sup>33</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 227–28, 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, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 515. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 472, points out that even in verse 17 the LXX has already used βασιλεία in harmony with verse 23.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 162–63. 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)."

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 the beast does not connect this period to John’s time.<sup>35</sup> 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 head in Rev 17:11 connects the phases of the beast to the division of the heads. As shown on page 154, 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.

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

Table 4: *The Phases of the Beast and the Division of the Heads*

The 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.”<sup>37</sup> This seems obvious when we look at the vision as a whole. Together with the beast the horns are involved in the downfall of the harlot just prior to the Millennium and the establish-

<sup>35</sup> If 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.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 56; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 296, 297, 300.

<sup>37</sup> Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 55.

ment of God's glorious everlasting kingdom. The heads are not even mentioned in this connection.

### 3.3. 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.<sup>38</sup> 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?'"<sup>39</sup>

### 3.4. 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-Persia, and Greece.<sup>40</sup> Although this

<sup>38</sup> See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 316.

<sup>39</sup> Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 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

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.<sup>41</sup> 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 suggests understanding the sixth head as Rome in both pagan and papal forms. The seventh head would then be the beast coming up from the earth (Rev 13:11–18). In his opinion this interpretation would fit the phrase "he must remain a little while."<sup>42</sup> This is a viable suggestion. However, in Revelation pagan and papal Rome are kept separate. The dragon of Rev 12 worked through pagan Rome to do away with the Messiah.<sup>43</sup> Papal Rome is portrayed as a separate entity, namely the sea beast of Rev 13:1–10.<sup>44</sup> This is not to deny that it contains traces of pagan Rome as

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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...." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 619, and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 317, list the same empires. However, Mounce shows that Alford has identified the seventh head as "the Christian empire beginning with Constantine" (317). Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 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.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Kenneth A. Strand, "'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes," in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies. Book 1* (Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6; ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 67.

<sup>42</sup> Edwin Reynolds, "The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 105.

<sup>43</sup> He 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, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:807. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 951, calls him a client king.

<sup>44</sup> The 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

well as of other empires. Furthermore, Rev 12, 13, and 17 are based on Dan 7 rather 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).

### 3.5. 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 ὀλίγος, a term clearly distinguished from others that indicate time or shortness of time.<sup>45</sup> The word ὀλίγος “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 (ὀλίγον καιρὸν). 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 meantime of about two millennia.<sup>46</sup>

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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, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:816–17, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2002), 22–32.

<sup>45</sup> In Rev 6:11 and 20:3 shortness of time is described with the phrase χρόνον μικρόν or μικρόν χρόνον. The martyrs have to wait for a while. Satan will be released for a short time. According to Rev 22:10 the time is near (καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς). In any of these cases the shortness of time cannot be determined. The nearness lasts almost two millennia. Smalley, *The Revelation of John*, 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....”

<sup>46</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 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, *The Book of Revelation*, 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 (μικρόν χρόνον) and therefore is not really comparable to Rev 17:10 (ὀλίγον) and Rev 12:12 (ὀλίγον καιρὸν).

The length of time expressed by ὀλίγος is dependent upon that with which it is compared. In Rev 12:12 ὀλίγος 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 ὀλίγος in comparison with the more than 4,000 years preceding the crucifixion.<sup>47</sup>

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

### 3.6. 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.<sup>48</sup> "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.<sup>49</sup> Although Corsini calls the eighth a king, he is quite clear when he writes: "Satan is 'the 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."<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>47</sup> Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:811.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 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, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 473, and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 318.

<sup>49</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 473. Cf. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 231.

<sup>50</sup> Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 325.

#### 4. 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.<sup>51</sup> They will receive authority<sup>52</sup> 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."<sup>53</sup> The battle against Jesus and probably his people<sup>54</sup> was already referred to in Rev 16:12–16. This battle as well as its outcome are further described in Rev 19:11–21.<sup>55</sup> In both passages Jesus is called the LORD of lords and King of kings, although in reversed order (Rev 17:14; 19:16). The destruction of Babylon by the loss of her support and the attack upon her is alluded to in Rev 16:12 under the image of the drying up of the Euphrates river.<sup>56</sup> Rev 18 will concentrate on the downfall of Babylon.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 879, connects the horns with the seventh head, because in John's time these powers were yet to come.

<sup>52</sup> It 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.

<sup>53</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation* (TNTC; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 206.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 952.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 516; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 952–53. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 880–81, deals extensively 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 (βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης, 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 (βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς, 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).

<sup>56</sup> For further discussion of the death of the harlot, see Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 956–57; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 883; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 517–18. Osborne, *Revelation*, 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

#### 4.1. The Identity of the Horns

It is generally acknowledged that these ten horn/kings are ruling contemporaneously<sup>58</sup> and that the OT allusion is Dan 7:7–8, 20, 24.<sup>59</sup> From thereon opinions vary. Some identify these kings as Parthian leaders or as rulers of Roman provinces.<sup>60</sup> Aune suggests that these horns are Roman client kings.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> Hughes thinks that the ten horns and “the kings of the whole world” (Rev 16:13–14) are the same group.<sup>63</sup> 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.”<sup>64</sup> Others suggest that the number ten is figurative pointing to the “idea of universal plenitude” and to completeness.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> Rejecting the

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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.”

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 625.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 950; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 300.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 878; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 516.

<sup>60</sup> For different options of interpretation see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 878; Ronald L. Farmer, *Revelation (Chalice Commentaries for Today)*; St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 116.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 951.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 621–22.

<sup>63</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 186.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 300.

<sup>65</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 878. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 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 ....”

<sup>66</sup> Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 326–27. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 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

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."<sup>67</sup>

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 only seven horns 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 into 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.<sup>68</sup> Neither are they subdivided. This may allow for a figurative interpretation. Furthermore, the question is as to 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" (βασιλεὺς) occurs in the singular and the plural. In the 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).

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symbolic and indicates completeness. It does not point to ten specific kings nor to ten European kingdoms of a revived Roman empire."

<sup>67</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 474.

<sup>68</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 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.

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 *inclusio* (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.<sup>69</sup>

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.

#### 4.2. Time References

The major activities of the horns as described in Rev 17 will take place during the last events of human history.<sup>70</sup> The ten horns will rule together with the beast for “one hour.” During this time 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.<sup>71</sup> This would indicate that “one hour” is a figurative designation of time. The majority of expositors suggest

<sup>69</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 883–84. Morris, *Revelation*, 205, rejects the view that the ten horns are the same as the kings of the earth.

<sup>70</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 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 days.”

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:857.

that the phrase "one hour" denotes a short period of time.<sup>72</sup> Morris points to the fact that the shortness of time may be according to God's concept of the shortness of time, not ours.<sup>73</sup> This interpretation still allows for the suddenness of the fall of Babylon.<sup>74</sup>

In the NT the term "hour" (ώρα), 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; 2 Cor 7:8; 1 Thess 2:17; Phlm 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;<sup>75</sup> John 2:4; 5:25; 12:23, 27), (7) a (short) period of time (1 John 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 occur within a context of judgment. Furthermore, in none of them a precise hour of sixty minutes is implied.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, it is preferable to take "hour" in Rev 17:12 as a short and undefined period of time.<sup>77</sup>

## 5. Summary and Conclusion

In this article we have suggested that the beast of Rev 17 should be understood as Satan.<sup>78</sup> 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.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 622; Farmer, *Revelation*, 116; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 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."

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Morris, *Revelation*, 205.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 622. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 879, points to the LXX of Dan 4:17 as the background of Rev 17:12. It is also found in a judgment context.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 952.

<sup>76</sup> Rev 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 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.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:856–57.

<sup>78</sup> Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 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."

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.

1. 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.
2. 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.<sup>79</sup> The sixth head seems to refer to John's time, that is, the first century A.D. The "was" phase of the beast also refers to historical time. 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.
3. 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, Greece, Rome, and the Papacy. The eighth is the beast itself, Satan.
4. 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, if the heads were involved 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:

1. 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.

<sup>79</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 864, notes that "the beast's existence extends from the beginning of history to its end ...."

2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The beast of Rev 17 is neither 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,<sup>80</sup> we should expect a fuller description of the beast's judgment in another place in the Apocalypse. This is actually found in Rev 20.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. In Rev 12 and 17 both the dragon and the scarlet 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 scarlet beast is more successful than the dragon is in Rev 12. One reason is that the apostate church does not enjoy divine protection as does the true church of God.
8. The beast of Rev 17 is an example of perfect opposition to God and Jesus. In the ultimate sense this applies to only Satan.
9. 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 woman 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....

<sup>80</sup> For 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 only fully portrayed in Rev 17 and 18. 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 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.<sup>81</sup>

10. 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."<sup>82</sup> 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 is itself 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. The chapter contains comfort for God's people. On the other hand, "the idea of imminence is expressed."<sup>83</sup> It is not long and then 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).

<sup>81</sup> Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 331.

<sup>82</sup> Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon: The New Testament in Context* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), 364.

<sup>83</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 871.

## Appendix

### The Beast of Revelation 17<sup>84</sup>

<b>HISTORICAL ERA</b>	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 40%;"> <p style="margin: 0;">"Five are fallen"</p> <p style="margin: 0;">"One is"</p> <p style="margin: 0;">"One is not yet come"</p> </div> <div style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 2em;">}</p> <p style="font-size: 2em;">{</p> <p style="font-size: 2em;">{</p> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p style="margin: 0;">1<sup>st</sup> Head</p> <p style="margin: 0;">2<sup>nd</sup> Head</p> <p style="margin: 0;">3<sup>rd</sup> Head</p> <p style="margin: 0;">4<sup>th</sup> Head</p> <p style="margin: 0;">5<sup>th</sup> Head</p> <p style="margin: 0;">6<sup>th</sup> Head      John's Time</p> <p style="margin: 0;">7<sup>th</sup> Head      10 Horns Concurrent</p> </div> </div>	
<b>ESCHATOLOGICAL ERA</b>	
<b>"IS NOT"</b>	<b>"Bottomless pit"/Abyss (Millennium)</b>
<b>"WILL COME"</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> Head (after Millennium)</b>
<b>"GOES TO DESTRUCTION"</b>	<b>"Perdition" (after Millennium)</b>

<sup>84</sup> The following diagram was adapted from Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 56.