

The Vision of John in Revelation 17

by Edwin Reynolds

The vision revealed to John in Revelation 17 is one of the most important and yet challenging visions in the book. Hardly two expositors of Revelation fully agree on its interpretation. A variety of assumptions affect one's interpretation of the symbolism of this significant chapter. In this paper, I will attempt to avoid external assumptions as far as possible and to work with the internal evidences provided within the context of the vision and the rest of the book in order to interpret the symbolism as John would presumably have understood it from his own frame of reference.

This vision is not limited to chapter 17. It is a further elaboration of the events that begin under the seventh bowl plague, including especially the fall of Babylon and of the nations (16:19), and it continues through chapter 18, which describes the judgment on Babylon and its effects, and at least the first few verses of chapter 19, which describe the rejoicing in heaven over her judgment. In fact, chapter 17 is not only about the fall of Babylon but also of the nations, represented by the heads and horns of the scarlet beast, and of the scarlet beast that the harlot Babylon is seated on. Revelation 17:8 speaks of the scarlet beast as ascending from the bottomless pit, or abyss, and going to perdition. That description actually carries the vision past the return of Christ (19:11-21) and the thousand years of the dragon in the bottomless pit (20:1-3) to his coming up out of the bottomless pit to gather the nations once more to make his final assault on the saints and the holy city (20:7-9), after which he and his hosts go into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet already are (20:10; cf. 19:20). Nonetheless, due to the focus imposed for the purposes of this symposium, this paper will limit its discussion primarily to those points raised within chapter 17, except as needed to take note of the wider context and its impact on the interpretation of chapter 17.

Chapter 17 is largely an overview of what Babylon represents and the relationship she has with the beast on which she is seated and its seven heads and ten horns. Verse 1 begins with one of the seven angels with the seven bowls talking with John. His message parallels that of another vision in 21:9-11, which also begins in the same way. In both, the message is, "Come, I will show you . . ."¹ In each, John is shown a woman and is provided with a description of the woman. In 17:1-4, John is shown a harlot or prostitute, while in 21:1-3, John is shown the bride, the Lamb's wife. There is an intentional comparison and contrast between the two passages. As it turns out, each woman is also described as a city. The first city is the great city Babylon. The second is the holy city, the new Jerusalem. The first is earthly; the second is heavenly. The first is connected with the scarlet beast and its heads and horns. The second is connected with the Lamb. The first is an evil, destructive force which will be judged and destroyed. The second is the holy home of the redeemed, having the tree of life and the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God.

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this paper are from the New King James Version.

It is worth noting that the image of the harlot first appears explicitly² here in Revelation and is unique to this vision, found only in 17:1, 15, 16, and in 19:2. The image of a harlot—and harlotry—was widely used in the Old Testament to symbolize spiritual adultery or religious apostasy, the violation of the marriage covenant with God, in which God’s people are unfaithful to their covenant with Him, to be His people and to have Him as their only God.³ Here in this vision, the harlot symbolizes a deceptive influence that causes the rulers, wealthy and powerful leaders, and the people of earth to compromise their principles and end up doing the work of the scarlet beast on whose heads she sits and rules (Rev 17:2, 9-10, 18; 18:3).

The Main Characters of the Vision (17:1-6)

In 17:1, John is shown not only a harlot but a harlot in a particular context, namely, “the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters.” This is not a historical context but an eschatological judgment context. One should not be looking for a historical application for this vision. This is the context of the seventh bowl plague, the judgment on the great city, Babylon.⁴ The “many waters” on which she sits are a reference to the great river Euphrates which flowed through and around the city of Babylon (Jer 51:13),⁵ but they are interpreted in verse 15 as representing “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.” Sitting on something (vv. 1, 3, 9) is interpreted in verse 18 as reigning or ruling over that entity, influencing and controlling that which she sits on. Babylon exerts her influence over the peoples, multitudes, nations, and language groups of earth. She has universal authority. As a great harlot-city, she is shown to have a perverse spiritual impact on others. As a universal authority on earth with an evil and corrupting influence, she is shown as being judged by God.

Those who have been compromised by their relationship with this harlot are described in verse 2. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. Wine is a symbol of that which alters judgment to allow people to do what they would not do if their good judgment were followed (Prov 20:1). It deceives people and leads them into wrong beliefs and practices. These immoral acts done under her corrupting influence are representative of spiritual unfaithfulness to God and His covenant. Prophetically, Babylon is a very negative spiritual influence on the rulers and people of earth. God will judge her for leading people to participate in her corrupt practices.

²It appears implicitly also in Rev 2:20-22, where the prophetess Jezebel commits adultery, and in 14:8, where Babylon commits fornication.

³Exod 34:12-16; Deut 31:16; Judg 2:16-17, 19-21; Jer 3:6-9; Ezek 16:8, 15-17, 25-38, 59; Hos 3:1-3. Cf. Clyde E. Harrington, “Prostitute,” *The New International Dictionary of the Bible (NIDB)*, ed. J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 829.

⁴Edwin Reynolds, “The Seven-headed Beast of Revelation 17,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 94.

⁵John R. Yeatts, *Revelation*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2003), 313, points to Jeremiah’s similar description of Babylon’s many waters: “Jeremiah describes Babylon as by many waters (Jer. 51:12-13), alluding to the ancient city’s irrigation system that directed the waters of the Euphrates so as to facilitate the river’s contribution to the wealth of the city.” Jon Paulien, *Seven Keys: Unlocking the Secrets of Revelation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009), writes, “The waters of Babylon—meaning the Euphrates River—was one of Babylon’s resources. They’re part of what protects Babylon. They function like a moat that goes both through and around the city. The drying up of the Euphrates, then, is a symbol of Babylon losing her defenses. God destroys Babylon by taking away her support system. The river Euphrates represents all the resources of Babylon.” The Euphrates provided Babylon not only with defense but also with transportation, communication, irrigation, and so forth, forming the support system for life in Babylon. This is the function of people for spiritual Babylon.

In verse 3, John is carried away in the Spirit—in vision—into the wilderness, where he sees the harlot sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names and having seven heads and ten horns. The wilderness is a place of judgment, a desolate and deserted place marked by drought and difficulty of survival except by God’s provision.⁶ This reinforces the context of judgment that we observed in verse 1. The blasphemous names on the scarlet beast on which she is seated also fit the context of judgment, since blasphemy was one of the most serious sins in Scripture that calls for judgment.⁷ Even just being a harlot is sufficient to be stoned, slain with the sword, or burned with fire.⁸ Her relationship with the scarlet beast also calls for judgment.

It is important to understand the nature of the harlot’s relationship with the scarlet beast. She is described in verse 3 as “sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” We have seen in verse 1 that she is also sitting on many waters, which are interpreted in verse 15 as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues; and in verse 9 she is sitting on the seven heads, which are interpreted as seven mountains and seven kings (v. 10). This sitting itself is interpreted in verse 18 as reigning over what she is sitting on. So, if she is sitting on the scarlet beast, she is reigning over it.⁹ If, technically, she is sitting on the heads (and horns) of the beast, which are the kings being referenced (vv. 10, 12) in verse 18, she is at least reigning over “the kings of the earth” as she rides the beast and at the same time reigns over the people of the earth who support her.

Who is this scarlet beast? Several lines of evidence are initially provided, while the larger interpretation will follow later. Scarlet is not only the color associated with sin (Isa 1:18) but also with wealth, power, and luxurious living.¹⁰ The harlot herself is clothed in scarlet (Rev 17:4), so there is an explicit association between the two based on the color scarlet. The scarlet beast is covered with blasphemous names, pointing to its claim to divine prerogatives and its slanderous accusations against God.¹¹ It has seven heads and ten horns, which feature points back to the great fiery red dragon of 12:3 and the sea beast of 13:1, but especially the former, from whom the latter gets its power, throne, and great authority (13:2), and even its resemblance. The heads and horns are uncrowned, unlike those in 12:3 and 13:1, perhaps because this vision is beyond history, that is, after the close of probation—under the judgment of the seventh bowl plague. Revelation 17:11 says that the scarlet beast is an eighth king (not head)¹² and “is of the seven,

⁶Jer 2:6; 4:26-27; 12:10-12; 17:6; 50:12-13; 51:43; Ezek 6:14; Rev 12:6, 14. See also Yeatts, 314. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 851, says, “Although the desert can be a place of protection for God’s people . . . , it is also the habitation of fierce animals like serpents and of evil spirits; it is the place of sin, judgment, and persecution of the saints.”

⁷Lev 24:16; 1 Kgs 21:13; Matt 26:65-66; Mark 14:64; John 10:33.

⁸Deut 22:13-21; Ezek 16:35-41; Lev 21:9.

⁹Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 195, says that the harlot is “in some sense his accomplice. . . . What astonishes John is neither the woman nor the beast alone, but the conjunction of the two; it is the woman and the beast *together* who constitute the *mystērion*.”

¹⁰2 Sam 1:24; Prov 31:21; Lam 4:5; Matt 27:28; Rev 18:12, 16. Cf. *NIDB*, s.v. “Scarlet,” which indicates that Isa 1:18 “may be the origin of the custom of using the term red or scarlet to denote things sinful, still in use today.” The same Greek word (*kokkinos*) can also be rendered as “crimson.”

¹¹John 10:33; Rev 16:9, 11, 21; cf. 2 Kgs 19:6; Isa 14:13-14; Dan 11:36; Rev 2:9; 13:1, 5-6.

¹²There are only seven heads. “Eighth” in Greek is masculine, implying “king” in the context, while “head” is feminine, so it cannot be the referent for “eighth,” as noted in “Of the seven,” *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 7:856. Isbon T.

and is going to perdition.”¹³ We will discuss this evidence and its implications further below as we address that verse, but the suggestion is that the scarlet beast is an eschatological world power in the line of the seven kings that preceded it historically, and this takes place just prior to its going to perdition.

The most important evidence in the description of the scarlet beast is found in 17:8, which we will also consider in more detail later. It says, “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.” This is repeated again at the end of the verse, substituting “yet is” for “will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.” It is repeated again in verse 11, where the sequence is restated as “was, and is not,” “is himself also the eighth,” and “is going to perdition.” So, after its initial active state, it goes into the bottomless pit, where it “is not [active],” then it comes out again (“yet is”), and functions as an eighth world power before going to perdition, something paralleled by the activity of the dragon, Satan, in 20:1-10. All of this strongly suggests that the scarlet beast actually is the dragon, Satan himself. We will subsequently consider the evidence for this more closely in the section on interpretation below.

In 17:4, John describes the way the harlot portrays herself to attract lovers. She is decked out in purple and scarlet garments. Purple was the color most valued in the ancient world. Due to the extremely expensive process of making it, purple cloth was worth a lot more than gold. It could be afforded only by the wealthiest persons. It became the garment of kings and nobility.¹⁴ Under the Roman emperors, the wearing of purple came to be reserved largely for senators and especially for the emperor himself.¹⁵ For the harlot to be shown wearing purple is an ostentatious announcement of her wealth and power.

Scarlet was a bright red color associated biblically with wealth and luxury as well as with sin and blood, as we saw earlier in connection with the scarlet beast. The harlot and the beast she sits on share the same color as part of their external appearance,¹⁶ signifying how they portray their character to the world. The Old Testament seems to associate this kind of clothing with harlotry. Jeremiah 4:30 portrays Jerusalem as a harlot that clothes herself with crimson/scarlet, adorns herself with ornaments of gold, and paints her eyes in a vain effort to make herself attractive to her lovers. Likewise, Isaiah 1:18, 21 depicts Jerusalem as a harlot whose “sins are like scarlet” and “are red like crimson.”

Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* ([New York]: Macmillan, 1919; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 699, asserts that this beast is “an eighth king, or world ruler, not an eighth head.”

¹³Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 316, writes, “He is of the seven, not *one* of the seven,” which “would normally call for ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ.” Alternatively, it could be read “belongs to the seven,” i.e., it is an eighth in the sequence of the seven kings, as opposed to the contemporaneous group of the ten kings, with which it is otherwise associated in 17:12-17.

¹⁴*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, completely rev. and updated ed., ed. Ronald F. Youngblood (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1995), s.v. “Colors of the Bible,” says, “The most precious of ancient dyes was purple. . . . A total of 250,000 mollusks was required to make one ounce of the dye, which partly accounts for its great price.”

¹⁵Christina Athanasiou, “Born in the Purple: The Imperial Color of the Roman Empire,” *Roman Empire Times*, <https://romanempiretimes.com/born-in-the-purple-imperial-color-roman-empire/>, accessed 8 April 2025.

¹⁶*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Colors of the Bible.”

The other things the harlot is wearing in 17:4 are also luxury items.¹⁷ In Revelation 18:16, the merchants of the earth—who are “the great men of the earth” (18:23)—describe Babylon as “that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls.” They sold her these very luxuries, according to 18:11-13, becoming “rich through the abundance of her luxury” (18:3). She wears the trophies of her relationships with the great men of the earth. In 18:7, the harlot is said to have “glorified herself and lived luxuriously,” saying, “I sit as a queen and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.” The clear intent of the description of the harlot is to portray her as a powerful, wealthy, and egotistical influence “which reigns over the kings of the earth” (17:18). She represents the spirit of Satan, who according to Isaiah 14:13-14 boasted, “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; / I will also sit on the mount of the congregation / On the farthest sides of the north; / I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, / I will be like the Most High.”

The harlot also has in her hand “a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication” (17:4). She may look attractive to potential lovers, but it is just a front. She is deeply corrupt and impure. The cup itself may look beautiful on the outside, but what’s inside is revolting, disgusting, abhorrent, and offensive, especially to God. An abomination describes what God hates and despises the most. This abomination and filthiness that her cup is full of is “the wine of her fornication,” with which “the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk” (v. 2). This wine is what perverts the judgment of those who drink it, leading them to yield to the filthiness of the harlot’s immorality.¹⁸ Because spiritual immorality is covenant unfaithfulness, the wine is that deceptive false teaching that leads to apostasy and unfaithfulness to God’s covenant. This is an abomination to God.

Verse 5 identifies the harlot by a name written on her forehead, the place where the character is formed, where reason and judgment take place.¹⁹ It is also the place where the sealed saints receive the seal of God (Rev. 7:3), and one of the places where the worshippers of the sea beast receive the mark of the beast (13:16). Before the name is identified, we find the word “MYSTERY.” A better translation would probably be “a mystery,” since what follows is a nominative case noun in apposition to *mysterion*. This is not part of the name but a statement of the symbolic character of the name.²⁰ It is a mystery, something that requires an explanation or interpretation. The symbols of the seven lampstands and the seven stars in Jesus’ right hand were called a mystery that needed interpretation (1:20). Now an explanation is being given to understand who this “great harlot” is. She is “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF

¹⁷Perhaps not incidentally, all but the pearls are identified with the sanctuary and its furnishings in the OT. Pearls, along with gold and precious stones, are found in the holy city in Rev 21, represented as “having the glory of God” (v. 11). These items were intended to reflect the beauty and glory of God and of Christ and the value He places on His plan for human salvation, but the harlot wears them to attract lovers to herself rather than to glorify God.

¹⁸Jeremiah 51:7 says of the drinking of Babylon’s wine, “Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD’s hand, / That made all the earth drunk. / The nations drank her wine; / Therefore the nations are deranged.”

¹⁹Some scholars argue that Roman prostitutes had names put on their foreheads, but this is uncertain, according to Thomas R. Schreiner, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 575. It seems preferable to see the name on the forehead in light of Rev 7:3; 13:16; and 14:1.

²⁰Yeatts, 316, says regarding the term “mystery,” “This does not mean that it is a puzzle, but that it is revealed through the prophets to the faithful (1:20; 10:7; Dan. 2:29-30; Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:6-7; 15:51; Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:25-27; 2 Thess. 2:7).” Cf. Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 439.

HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” In 14:8, Babylon is described as the great city which made all nations drink the wine of the passion (*thymos*) of her fornication. This allusion to the Old Testament Babel or Babylon, which was a great city that exalted itself above the God of heaven and oppressed His people, is to be understood in a spiritual way. The harlot is a spiritual influence that is corrupting the world and persecuting God’s faithful people.

Babylon is not only a great harlot but she is also the mother of harlots. Ezekiel 16 is addressed to Jerusalem, the city of God and His people, the place where He chose to establish His throne and His name.²¹ It says that God loved Jerusalem and treated her as a beautiful bride (vv. 8-14), yet she trusted in her beauty and sought other lovers, becoming a harlot like Sodom and Samaria before her (vv. 15-17, 25-26, 28-36, 46-51). God said to her that everyone would cite a proverb against her: “Like mother, like daughter” (v. 44). Now Babylon is revealed to be the mother who has daughters like herself. They too are harlots. The offspring of the mother become like her because she models for them the corrupt behavior she represents, namely, her rebellion against God and His principles. It is pride in her own concept of beauty and power. It is the spirit of Satan, the scarlet beast.²² All who manifest the spirit of Babylon and share in her sins will share also in her judgment (Rev 18:3-4, 9-10, 15-19).

Babylon is not only the mother of harlots but also the mother of the abominations of the earth (Rev. 17:5). Her cup is full of abominations and the filthiness of her immorality (v. 4), and she is enticing the kings of the earth to commit fornication with her and is making the inhabitants of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication (v. 2). Her spiritual daughters are learning to do the same things. They, too, are presenting their attractive false teachings as enticements to become involved in her abominations and filthy immorality. Thus, the spiritual offspring of Babylon are portrayed as being just like her. They may look attractive on the outside, but inside they are full of corrupt and abominable teachings and practices. Only the teachings of God’s word will enable the inhabitants of the earth to discern the true from the false and to protect themselves from the enticements of Babylon and her spiritual daughters.

Babylon’s impending judgment is based not only on her corrupt teachings and practices. Verse 6 informs us that she is also drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus. The saints are those who are faithful in living for God. When confronted by the demands of spiritual Babylon to compromise their faith and commit fornication with the harlot or her daughters, they become martyrs rather than compromise their faith. Babylon becomes drunk with their blood, meaning that not only has she had enough blood to become drunk, as with wine, but she makes the saints’ martyrdom an occasion to party (cf. 11:10). When the harlot is drunk, she can do, without troubling her conscience, things that a rational person would not think of doing. This act of martyring the saints is given in 18:24 as the culminating reason for her judgment: “And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain [i.e., martyred] on the earth.”²³ Justice demands her judgment.

²¹See 1 Kgs 11:36; 2 Kgs 21:4; 2 Chr 33:4, 7; Jer 3:17; Matt 5:35.

²²Compare the spirit of Satan in Ezek 28:16-19.

²³The Greek word, *esphagmenōn* from *sphazō*, refers, on one hand, to slaying sacrificially, as in the LXX of Lev 14:51; Deut 28:31; Isa 53:7 (cf. Acts 8:32); and in Rev 5:6, 12; 13:8. On the other hand, it may refer to violent slaughter in battle or in an attempt to exterminate one’s hated enemies, as in Jer 11:19; 12:3; 2 Macc 5:14; Rom

Upon observing this situation, John was filled with amazement (17:6). It is said that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This powerful harlot is absolutely corrupt, even satanic. Who is this great, debauched harlot called Babylon, who without a pang of conscience slaughters the saints, the faithful people of God? And who is this scarlet, seven-headed ten-horned beast she is seated on? What are represented by the seven heads and the ten horns? And what is represented by the many waters on which she is also seated? John's head is filled with questions that need to be answered, not just for John but also for his readers in the churches for whom these visions were given (1:11; 22:6, 16).

The Interpretation of the Symbolic Characters

The interpreting angel comes to John in verse 7 and says to him, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and ten horns." What a relief! John will now receive the explanation of this mysterious woman and the scarlet beast on which she is seated. The angel will even explain about the seven heads and the ten horns on the scarlet beast. He will first describe the beast more fully, providing evidences for who the beast represents (v. 8). Then he will interpret its seven heads for John (vv. 9-10). Next, he tells more about the beast in its relation to the heads (v. 11). Then the angel explains about the relationship between the ten horns and the beast and their war with the Lamb (vv. 12-14). Before he continues, the angel interprets the many waters on which the harlot sits (v. 15). Then he comes back to the ten horns and their ultimate turn against the harlot to destroy her according to the purpose of God (vv. 16-17). Finally, he will explain briefly about who the harlot herself represents (v. 18).

The Scarlet Beast

In verse 8, the angel explains that the scarlet beast "was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition." This sounds like a parody or counterfeit for Almighty God, "who is and who was and who is to come," or literally, who is coming (1:4, 8; 11:17; cf. 4:8). While that is certainly true, we learn more by noting the time relationships in terms of the time context of the vision itself. The vision has to do with the judgment of the great harlot (17:1), which is an enlargement on the judgment on Babylon under the seventh bowl plague (16:19), as we have seen above. The description of the beast within this time context is that he "was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition." He "was" in the past, "is not" in the present, and "will ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition" in the future. So, during the time of the vision, which is Babylon's judgment under the seventh bowl plague and the return of Christ, the scarlet beast "is not." Clearly, he is not dead, for he will ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition.²⁴ He was active until this judgment time. He is not active while he is in the bottomless pit, being bound and prevented from doing his regular work, as 20:3 describes in the case of the dragon: "so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished" (20:3). He will become active again when he comes up from the

8:36; Rev 6:9. *Sphazō* is the word used twice in 1 John 3:12 to describe Cain's murder or slaughter of his brother Abel, connecting that event to Rev 18:24. When viewed in the light of Rev 6:9; 17:6; 18:20; and 19:2, it becomes clear that this is not a statement about killing in general but refers to the violent slaughter of faithful martyrs.

²⁴ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 250, says, "The language describes absence, but absence does not mean nonexistence."

bottomless pit before he goes to perdition at some point in the future. So, it is clear that the scarlet beast is inactive, not dead or nonexistent, while he is in the bottomless pit. This is not intended by John to be equated with the historical deadly wound of the beast from the sea, from which it subsequently recovers (13:3), as many scholars have rashly assumed.²⁵

Quite a number of scholars have identified the scarlet beast with the beast from the sea in 13:1-8.²⁶ This cannot really be so, for several reasons. For one thing, the beast from the sea has ten crowns on its horns, indicating that it is seen as active only during the period after the ten horns of Daniel 7:24 came to power during the Roman period and were followed by the rise of the “little horn” power, which ruled and persecuted the saints “for a time and times and half a time” (7:25), the same as the forty-two months when the beast from the sea did the same (Rev 13:5-7). The scarlet beast, on the other hand, has seven heads, five of which are already fallen in John’s day, and the one that “is” for John is pagan Rome long before the emergence of the ten horns in the fifth century A.D. and the little horn in the sixth century, namely the beast from the sea. Its ten horns are uncrowned because it is the eighth power in the eschatological judgment period. The scarlet beast is greater than any one of its seven heads and ten horns, while the beast from the sea is only one of the seven heads of the dragon. The beast from the sea is a historical power, one of the seven heads of the scarlet beast, which loses its power and is uncrowned in the eschatological vision of Revelation 17, the vision of the judgment on Babylon. The scarlet beast goes into the bottomless pit at the time of the judgment of the harlot Babylon (17:8), while the beast from the sea goes into the lake of fire at that time, along with the false prophet (19:20). The scarlet beast then comes up out of the bottomless pit (17:8) after a thousand years (20:3) and is temporarily active again (17:11; 20:7-8) before going to perdition in the lake of fire, where the sea beast and the false prophet already are (17:11; 20:10).²⁷

What does it mean to be in the bottomless pit? The Greek word translated “bottomless pit” in the NKJV is *abyssos*, which means “without a bottom.” A number of modern Bible versions transliterate it as “the abyss.” It was used in the Septuagint version of Genesis 1:2, which in the NKJV reads, “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep” (*abyssos*). The word appears 138 times in the Greek Scriptures. “The deep,” or abyss, was used originally as a reference to the deep, dark, layer of water covering the unlighted planet before creation (Gen 1:2). After the creation, it was used to refer to the waters under the earth which burst forth at the time of the great flood of Noah’s day and later were stopped (7:11; 8:2), or of

²⁵For example, George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 226; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares, Vol. 2: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985), 475; Mounce, 312; Ranko Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013), 207-8. Jeff Scoggins, *A Simple Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Boonsboro, MD: Skapto, 2018), 381-82, compares the two beasts but insists, “The scarlet beast is not to be confused with the beast from the sea that we met in Rev. 13” (381).

²⁶See, e.g., Norman McNulty, *Commentary on the Book of Revelation: Practical Living in the Judgment Hour* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2022), 452-53; Lauren M. K. Nelson, *Understanding the Mysteries of Daniel and Revelation* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2016), 345; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 524; Louis F. Were, *The Woman and the Beast in the Book of Revelation: Studies in Revelation 12-20* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983), 164-66.

²⁷Ekkehardt Müller, “The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion (Part 1),” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10, no. 1 (2007): 39.

the oceans and large bodies of water that remained after the flood.²⁸ Eventually, it took on metaphorical value as the place of the dead (Rom 10:7) or the place where God consigns demons reserved for judgment (Luke 8:31; cf. 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 20:1-3).²⁹

Satan, the king of the demons (Rev 9:11),³⁰ is found in Revelation 20:1-3 to be chained in the abyss while awaiting judgment, then he is released to once again deceive the nations of earth to gather them to battle against God's holy city and the saints who reside there (Rev 20:7-9). At the time of Satan's binding in the abyss, the earth will be in some ways like it was before creation, a desolate, chaotic place, formless and empty, depicted as a wilderness (Rev 17:3; cf. Jer 4:23-27) after the upheaval of the earth's crust under the seventh bowl plague (Rev 16:20; cf. 6:14). Satan, after a thousand years isolated in this abyss, will come up out of the abyss and will become active once more until he is destroyed in the lake of fire, or perdition (20:7-10).³¹ The scarlet beast seems to be identified with Satan himself, who through his heads and horns—the kings of the earth—acts to accomplish his purposes on earth.³²

The text (17:8) says that those who dwell on the earth whose names are not written in the Book of Life will marvel when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. "Yet is" is equivalent to "will ascend out of the bottomless pit." When they see that the scarlet beast has recovered from his imprisonment and reasserts his authority over the kings and people of earth (20:7-8),³³ they are amazed and allow him to be their leader once again, much like they did in 13:3-4, even to worshiping him (13:4), something reserved for God alone (19:10; 22:8-9). How can the wicked see the beast that "yet is" if they died at the return of Jesus (19:15, 21)? We are told in Revelation 20:5, 13 that they are raised to life again at the end of the thousand years, and they are gathered together by Satan to attack the saints who are in the beloved city (vv. 8-9) before they face their final judgment (v. 12) and fire comes down from heaven and consumes them (v. 9) in the lake of fire (vv. 10, 15; 21:8; cf. 2 Pet 3:10-12). There can be little doubt that

²⁸For example, Job 28:14; 38:16; 41:31; Pss 33:7; 69:15; 104:6; 148:7; Isa 44:27; 51:10; Jonah 2:3, 5; Luke 5:4; 2 Cor 11:25.

²⁹*NIDB*, s.v. "Abyss." The bottomless pit (or abyss) is the desolate earth—the "wilderness" in which the judgment takes place (17:1)—on which the devil is bound (with his evil angels) without any people to deceive (Jer 4:23-27). Jeremiah 4:23-27 is a statement of judgment alluding to the condition of the earth prior to creation, when "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep" (Gen 1:2). Jeremiah 4:23-27 cannot describe a desolate Judah, even if that is the local context, for Judah would not be like the earth before creation. It would be inhabited by some people, animals, and birds during the Babylonian captivity. Further, the mountains and hills did not tremble and move, as in the seventh bowl plague (Rev 16:20). Jeremiah is prophesying a greater desolation than that of Judah, equivalent to the wilderness judgment of the whole earth and of its ruler, Satan, during the thousand years.

³⁰The locusts in Rev 9:11 whose king is the angel of the bottomless pit, Abaddon, Apollyon, or Satan, are the demonic forces over which the star fallen from heaven in 9:1—also Satan—is king. Tonstad, 247, states, "'The bottomless pit' is the domain of the fallen star and thus the home base of the dragon (9:1)."

³¹Reynolds, "Seven-headed Beast," 101, observes, "There is only one Beast which goes into the Abyss in Revelation and comes out of it again."

³²Ekkehardt Müller, "The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion (Part 2)," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10, no. 2 (2007): 153-58, argues on similar evidence for the same conclusion.

³³These kings and people are referred to in Rev 20:8 as "Gog and Magog," pointing the reader to Ezek 38-39, where the peoples and nations "out of the far north" (38:15; 39:2) that are named there (cf. Gen 10) gather "against the mountains of Israel" (Ezek 39:2) and attack the people of God, "My people Israel" (38:14; 39:7), "a peaceful people, who dwell safely" (38:11) "in the midst of the land" (38:12), which God calls "My land" (38:16), a parallel to what takes place in Rev 20:7-9, ending in a similar judgment with fire and brimstone from God (Ezek 38:22).

the scarlet beast in the bottomless pit is Satan, the great red dragon of Revelation 12.³⁴

Revelation 17:11 again clarifies the point: “And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.” So, “is himself also the eighth” is equivalent to “yet is” and “will ascend out of the bottomless pit.” He is the eighth king during the time when the judgment on Babylon takes place (when he “was”) until he goes into the bottomless pit (when he “is not”), but especially after he comes up from the bottomless pit and leads his hosts to attack the holy city (when he “yet is”) before going to perdition in the lake of fire.

The Seven Heads

In Revelation 17:9, the angel moves to an explanation of the seven heads of the scarlet beast. He calls for a mind that has wisdom. Genuine wisdom comes only from God (Jas 1:5), so the implication is that, to understand this explanation, one needs to have a connection with God. Divine aid is necessary for the task. Human intelligence alone will not provide the answer. Daniel was told regarding understanding predictive prophecy that “none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand” (Dan 12:10). The call for wisdom at this point in the narrative indicates a transition from description to interpretation. This transition requires not only wisdom but a shift in the time reference. For John to understand the seven heads, he needs to move his point of reference from the time context of the vision, which is eschatological, to his own time context, which is historical.³⁵ The seven heads and ten horns in verse 3 are uncrowned, as we have seen, because the vision is an elaboration of the vision of the seven bowl plagues under the seventh trumpet, which is after “the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15). The vision is eschatological, but the interpretation is historical, for the sake of John’s need for interpretation.

The angel says in 17:9, “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.” They are not literal mountains, nor are they seven hills.³⁶ The mountains are symbols for

³⁴Tonstad, 247, says, “Revelation appears to blend the identities of the dragon and the [scarlet] beast.” He concludes regarding the beast of 17:8, “*This is the dragon*” (250). See also Kenneth Mathews, Jr., *Revelation Reveals Jesus* (Greeneville, TN: Second Coming Publishing, 2012), 2:926-27.

³⁵Müller, “Beast of Revelation 17 (Part 2),” 164; Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Publications, 1976), 55.

³⁶Despite widespread agreement by preterist interpreters that the seven mountains represent the seven hills of Rome, the language of the text does not support such an interpretation. My own research in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* found five references to the seven hills of Rome. In each case, the Greek word for hills was *bounoi* not *orē*, as in Rev 17:9. (See Reynolds, “Seven-headed Beast,” 104.) Since Luke 23:30 uses both terms, we know that John would have known the difference between a mountain (*oros*) and a hill, mound, or eminence (*bounos*) like the seven hills of Rome, which were not mountains. Ladd, 227, argues against the seven mountains as representing the seven hills of Rome, stating, “It is a biblical commonplace that a hill or mountain is a symbol of power or rule.” He then quotes or cites six biblical examples of such use, concluding, “It is easier, therefore, to understand the seven hills to stand for seven empires and the rulers who headed them.” Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 209, points out that “neither literal hills or mountains are correct here, because the angel immediately explains to John that these seven mountains actually symbolize ‘seven kings’ (17:10).” It can be further argued that the seven hills of Rome cannot be said to be consecutive, with five fallen, one present, and another yet to come. Tonstad, 248, concludes, “The ‘seven mountains’ are not a coded reference to imperial Rome.” See also the lengthy argument against this interpretation provided by Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (N.p.: C. C. Cook, 1900; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1987), 391-92.

kingdoms in Scripture (Dan 2:35, 44; Jer 51:25; Rev 8:8).³⁷ Verse 10 (NKJV) says, “There are also seven kings.” This would be better translated, “They are also seven kings,” as it reads in a number of other Bible versions.³⁸ The NAB and NLT versions state, “They also represent seven kings.” Because the power or authority of a kingdom resides in its king, the distinction between a king and its kingdom is not significant (cf. Dan 2:37-40; 7:17, 23-24; 8:20-22).

The seven heads represent seven historical kingdoms or powers. The language—kings, kingdoms—was the language of the day.³⁹ It did not mean that later democratic nations or republics were excluded. The text says, “Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come” (Rev 17:10). For John to understand which nations the angel was designating, it had to be from his own historical perspective. It could not point only to nations at the time of the judgment of spiritual Babylon at the end of history. Five of these national powers were no longer in power; they were already fallen in John’s past. One of the powers was current in John’s day. And one still lay in the future from John’s perspective. Since it would follow the other six and continue only a short time before the judgment of spiritual Babylon, it must arise near the end of history. Clearly, these seven kingdoms would be consecutive, one following the other. These kingdoms should not be understood independently of the kingdoms prophesied about in the book of Daniel, since those kingdoms both predated John and would follow one another as leading powers in the engagement with God’s people until the kingdom of Christ should destroy all of those kingdoms and stand forever (Dan 2:37-44).⁴⁰

The best starting point for understanding these kingdoms is with the one that was current in John’s day. That would be the Roman empire, represented in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as recorded in Daniel 2:40 by the iron legs of the image, the fourth kingdom in the image. It was also represented by the fourth beast of Daniel 7:7, 19, 23, a great and terrible beast with huge iron teeth and claws of bronze, “devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet.” According to Daniel 8, it followed the kingdom of Greece (8:21-24), which followed the kingdom of Medo-Persia (8:20-25; 10:20; 11:2-3). Medo-Persia had followed the kingdom of Babylon (Dan 5:28, 30-31; 6:28), the first kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (2:37-38; cf. 1:1). That leaves two earlier kingdoms to be identified. We know from the Bible and history that the kingdom that preceded Babylon in invading and conquering Israel and most of Judah was Assyria.⁴¹ It is not mentioned in Daniel’s prophecies because it was no longer in power during Daniel’s time. Daniel’s prophecies began with the current kingdom, Babylon (Dan 1:1). Before Assyria, Egypt was the nation that the Bible reveals was the first to oppress God’s covenant

³⁷Beale, 868, points out regarding *oros* that “elsewhere in the Apocalypse it always means ‘mountain’ and is used figuratively to connote strength (so seven occurrences).” He adds, “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. Mountains symbolize kingdoms in the OT and Jewish writings” (ibid.), for which he cites seven examples. Cf. Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 435.

³⁸E.g., CSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NRSV, RSV, TNIV.

³⁹Biblical prophecy does not distinguish between a king and other kinds of political rulers, since all supreme rulers were kings, including the Roman emperors (1 Pet 2:13, 17).

⁴⁰Omele Kevin Burrell, “Conceptualizing Historical Periodization in the Apocalypse: The Canonical Shaping of the Beast with Seven Heads and Ten Horns,” MA thesis, Trinity Western University, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/?h=13593528&from_sutd_work_id=13593528, accessed 17 April 2025, 109, citing several authorities, argues that the book of Daniel, particularly chapter 7, forms the major allusive background for the book of Revelation.

⁴¹See 2 Kgs 17:20-23; 18:9-13; Isa 7:16-17; Jer 50:17-18.

people, the descendants of Abraham.⁴² So, the five kingdoms that had fallen were, in order, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece.⁴³

Each of these nations had oppressed God's people in their turn. Egypt had oppressed and enslaved God's people in Egypt for four hundred years (Gen 15:13; Acts 7:6). Assyria had afflicted Israel and Judah for about 160 years, taking Israel into permanent captivity in 722 B.C. and trying to conquer Judah in 701 B.C. Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and had taken the people of Judah into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.⁴⁴ Medo-Persia, under the Persian king Xerxes I, or Ahasuerus as he is called in the book of Esther, ordered the destruction of the people of Israel who had not returned to Judea under the decree of Cyrus (Esth 3:8-13). Greece, under the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, sought to outlaw Judaism and force the Jews to adopt Hellenistic practices (1 Macc 1:10-62).

The kingdom that was active in John's day, the sixth head, was Rome (Luke 2:1; 3:1; Acts 18:2; 25:10-12). That iron kingdom, according to Daniel 2:40-44, would continue in some form until the kingdom of Christ would destroy all earthly kingdoms and fill the earth with His eternal kingdom. Daniel does not identify more than four such kingdoms. The iron kingdom in Daniel 2 continues into the feet and toes of the image, though the iron is "mixed with ceramic clay" (v. 41) to show that it would be "partly strong and partly fragile" (v. 42). In Daniel 7, the fourth and final beast, which was "dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong," with "huge iron teeth" (7:7) and "nails of bronze" (v. 19), is shown to have ten horns—"ten kings / Who shall arise from this kingdom" (v. 24). These horns are not a fifth kingdom but an aspect of the Roman empire that would develop later, arising from within Rome and functioning as contemporaneous lesser powers that in turn would be followed by a "little horn" that grows great and speaks pompous words against the Most High (v. 25). The little horn would also persecute the saints for "a time and times and half a time" while intending to "change times and law" (v. 25). This same power is seen again in the "little horn" of Daniel 8, which is described in verses 23-25 as not only destroying "the mighty and also the holy people" but also magnifying himself in his heart so that "He shall even rise against the Prince of princes." Historical reflection strongly suggests that this blasphemous antichrist power is the papal power that established the Holy Roman Empire that

⁴²See Exod 1:13-14; 3:7; 12:40-41.

⁴³Many scholars affirm this view, including Mathews, 2:930; Scoggins, 386; Seiss, 393; and Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus*, 525. Beale, 874, after demonstrating the problems with the popular preterist view of the seven kings being seven Roman emperors, concludes, "The attempt to identify the seven kings with particular respective world empires may be more successful, since it is more in keeping with the 'seven heads' in Dan. 7:3-7, which represent four specific empires. The first five kings, who 'have fallen,' are identified with Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece; Rome is the one who 'is,' followed by a yet unknown kingdom to come." Ultimately, he does not subscribe fully to this view, seeing the seven heads as figurative, "symbolizing all empires throughout history" (875). Ladd, 229, writes, "The great harlot who seduces the nations and persecutes the saints finds her support from the beast who appears in history in a succession of secular, godless kingdoms; five belong to past history; a sixth kingdom—Rome—ruled the world when John wrote." He adds on p. 230, "The heads are successive manifestations of the worldly kingdoms at enmity with God through all the changes of history." Cf. Kenneth A Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?" in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 186-91.

⁴⁴2 Chr 36:17-21; Jer 25:9-12; Dan 1:1-2; 9:1-2.

lasted for a thousand years before the pope was taken captive in 1798 by Napoleon's armies.⁴⁵ This power is seen again in Revelation 13, especially under the image of the beast from the sea that was wounded but recovered again (13:1-8),⁴⁶ but it also shows up alongside the beast from the land (13:11-17) and continues until the end, when it is destroyed in "the lake of fire" at the return of Christ (19:20).

Rome, like its predecessors, became a conquering and persecuting power to God's people, both Jews and Christians. In A.D. 70, Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, with more than a million Jews killed and nearly a million more taken into captivity, according to Josephus.⁴⁷ Rome continued its persecution of God's people under the pagan emperors during the first Christian centuries until the early fourth century. By the sixth century, the western Roman empire was taken over by the papacy, which in turn became a persecuting power, continuing the oppression of God's faithful Bible-believing people under the power of Rome until about 25 years before receiving its deadly wound in 1798.⁴⁸ Thus, all five of the fallen kingdoms plus the kingdom ruling during John's time and beyond demonstrated their defiance of God and their hatred of His people. There remains one more kingdom or power: the seventh head.

The seventh head is not found in Daniel, who deals only with Old World kingdoms, but we find it in Revelation, which introduces the New World in chapters 12 and 13. In 12:6, 14-16, we see that after the victory of Christ by His death and resurrection, pointed to in 12:5, 10-11, the defeated dragon turned his wrath against the woman, so God provided nourishment for her in the wilderness⁴⁹ for a time, times, and half a time (v. 14)—or 1260 days/years⁵⁰ (v. 6), the same time period variously found in Daniel 7:25; 12:7; and Revelation 11:2-3; 13:5. Before the end of that period, "the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood" (Rev 12:15). The flood of water represents people (17:15) who, in the context of the Old World population, provided no room for the persecuted faithful to escape and hide any longer, so "the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of its mouth" (12:16). This strongly suggests the opening up of the New World at that time and providing sanctuary for those needing to escape from the flood that threatened to swallow them up. They ended up in a sparsely populated place where they could pray in freedom and establish laws that would ultimately protect minority religious groups from the tyranny of the majority. At the end of the

⁴⁵C. Mervyn Maxwell, "Roman Catholicism and the United States," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 76-77.

⁴⁶Reynolds, "Seven-headed Beast," 98; Maxwell, *God Cares*, Vol. 2, 327; Hans K. LaRondelle, *Light for the Last Days: Jesus' End-Time Prophecies Made Plain in the Book of Revelation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 76; Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 153-55.

⁴⁷Josephus, *Jewish War* 6:420. See also Dan 9:26-27; Matt 24:2, 15-16; Luke 21:20-24.

⁴⁸Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 306.

⁴⁹The wilderness, or desert, in Scripture represents a desolate place where few people can survive, but where, as with the children of Israel in the wilderness, God is able to provide for their safety and nourishment (cf. footnote 5). Beale, 645, observes, "The protection is not physical. God guards the saints rather from spiritual deception."

⁵⁰Based on the day-for-a-year principle found most clearly in the seventy-week prophecy of Dan 9:24-27, each day of apocalyptic prophecy represents a literal year. See William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982), 56-88.

1260 years, which ended in 1798,⁵¹ the dragon would become “enraged with the woman” and would go “to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (12:17)—clearly the faithful people of God.

Revelation 13 is the elaboration of 12:13-17, providing the details of the powers through whom the dragon accomplishes this persecution during the 1260 years and beyond. The beast from the sea (13:1-8) represents the papal Roman power, the extension of the sixth head after the ten horns have been crowned and “the little horn” arises to its blasphemous and persecuting power.⁵² The beast from the land⁵³ in 13:11-17 represents a last-day power that does a similar work but, instead of receiving worship, it directs worship to the first beast and to an image it creates to honor the beast from the sea. It begins innocently enough, being described as having only two horns like a lamb (v. 11a). Yet the prophecy points to a time, apparently near the end, when the lamblike beast will begin to speak like a dragon (v. 11b). It will exercise “all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (v. 12). It will also perform great signs and will deceive those who dwell on the earth “by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast,” telling them “to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” (vv. 13-14). In other words, in addition to the first beast, namely, the papal power which receives worship (vv. 4, 12), blasphemes God (v. 6),⁵⁴ and persecutes the saints (v. 7),⁵⁵ a second power equal to it in authority, deceptive power, and persecuting ferocity (13:15) will function in the end to work together against God, Christ, and Their people (16:13-14; 19:19). This second power is also called the False Prophet (16:13; 19:19; cf. 13:14), working hand in hand with the papal power to achieve the same goals. It seems to best represent the United States of America with apostate Protestantism cooperating to support the worship of the papacy and its false form of worship which the text calls “the image to the beast” (13:14-15).⁵⁶ There is no other power found in the time of the end in Scripture that would be equivalent to the six powers preceding it.⁵⁷ It continues for a relatively short period of time,⁵⁸ particularly in its dragon-like

⁵¹William H. Shea, “Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12-13,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MI: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 333-34.

⁵²Hans K. LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7, ed. Frank K. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 165-72.

⁵³Reynolds, “Seven-headed Beast,” 99-100, notes that the rise of this beast from the land/earth rather than from the sea, as did all the beasts before it, signals the opening of the New World, a relatively unpopulated area.

⁵⁴The text states that this includes God’s name, His tabernacle (heavenly sanctuary ministry, as in Dan 8:11-13), and those who dwell in heaven (the saints, the heavenly host, as in Dan 8:10, 13; cf. 7:27; Eph 2:6; Phil 3:20).

⁵⁵Compare Dan 7:25; 8:10, 13, 24; Rev 11:2.

⁵⁶T. E. Andrews and T. Z. Andrews, *Studies in Revelation: An Exposition of Chapters 12 & 17* (College Place, WA: Walla Walla College Print, 1902), 21-22, 25, argue that “the United States of America,” which “is symbolized by the two-horned beast of Rev. 13:11-17,” “must be regarded as the seventh and last head of the dragon.” Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 152, asserts that the land beast which is called the false prophet “thus represents the United States in its religious campaign to support the power of Babel.”

⁵⁷Tonstad, 249-52, makes a solid case that “the one” who “is” and “the other” who “has not yet come” are a pair found in chapter 13 and that the pair constitute the sixth and seventh heads, namely, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth/land.

⁵⁸Reynolds, “Seven-headed Beast,” 105, notes the important significance of the priority of *oligos* in the Greek construction, emphasizing “a short time” rather than “he must continue” at that late period before history ends.

phase, where it is acting on behalf of the dragon as described in 12:17 and 13:12-17, compared with the Roman power that preceded it. This is the best candidate for the seventh head of the scarlet beast. This power, also referred to as the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10),⁵⁹ appears together with the dragon and the beast from the sea as preparing for and making war against God and the Lamb during the final spiritual battle at the end of the seven last plagues just prior to Christ's return (16:15).

The seven heads, then, represent seven great powers through history that have posed or will pose a threat to the corporate people of God because of their distinctive worship, refusing to acknowledge a false system of worship as represented by the kingdom in power. These seven heads are mostly past, but we find ourselves in the time of the healing of the deadly wound of the sea beast, the last phase of the sixth head, and in the time of the seventh head, probably entering into its final phase.

This is a momentous time to be alive. We live not only in the final days of the seventh head, which must continue for only a short time (17:10) before the judgment takes place at Jesus' return, but also in the days of the feet and toes of the image of Daniel 2: "In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan 2:44). We also live in the last days of the sixth seal, between 6:13 and 6:14, waiting for the sky to recede "like a scroll when it is rolled up"⁶⁰ just prior to the return of Christ, which takes place under the very brief seventh seal.⁶¹ We live under the end of the sixth trumpet, waiting for the mystery of God to be finished (10:7), namely, the gospel going to all the world (Matt 24:14),⁶² so that the announcement can come from heaven, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15). There is much hope and encouragement to be found in understanding where we find ourselves in the prophetic scheme of things.

The Scarlet Beast as an Eighth in Relation to the Seven Kings

In Revelation 17:11, we move from the explanation of the broad scheme of history to the specifics of final events that will take place in connection with the judgment on Babylon, which is the major theme of the chapter. John is told by the interpreting angel that "the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition." It is not one of the seven heads of the beast but the beast "himself" that is an eighth power. The scarlet beast is described here as "was, and is not," because the emphasis now moves to the "is not" phase,

⁵⁹A careful comparison of 19:20 with 13:14 reveals that the false prophet is the beast from the land.

⁶⁰The best translation of this phrase in the Greek is debated, and various translations reflect this uncertainty. The passive verb translated as "receded" in the NKJV, NIV, and TNIV has also been rendered "was split apart" (NASB, NET), "departed" (KJV), and "vanished" (ESV, NRSV, RSV) or "disappeared" (NJB), among other alternatives. Regardless of the translation, the concept appears to be a dramatic change in the sky as we observe it, in preparation for the return of Christ.

⁶¹Edwin Reynolds, "The Mystery of the Seventh Seal," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 33, nos. 1-2 (2022): 60-85.

⁶²See also Rom 16:25-26; Eph 1:9-10; 3:3-7; 6:19; Col 1:25-27; 2:2; 4:3.

during which the beast is chained in the abyss.⁶³ His deceptive work is now on hold, for he is shut up and sealed “so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (20:3), unable to continue his work because the people he had deceived were killed by the sword that comes out of the mouth of the Rider on the white horse at His return (19:21). Yet the verse ends with “and is going to perdition” (17:11), describing the scarlet beast’s final end in the lake of fire (20:10). Before that, however, the interpreting angel explains to John that the scarlet beast “is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven.” It would better read “an eighth” than “the eighth,” since the definite article is missing in the Greek text.⁶⁴ This is how almost all other Bible versions read. This means that he is an eighth king in the consecutive line of seven kings or kingdoms, a ruler that follows the seven great historical powers in the eschatological period after the close of probation and the end of the historical powers. He cannot be considered to be an eighth head, for the Greek adjective “eighth” is masculine, so it cannot refer to the feminine noun “head.”⁶⁵ There are only seven heads, but there are eight kings, and the scarlet beast “himself” is an eighth king in the sequence of—or following—the seven kings, as opposed to the ten horns or kings, which all rule at the same time. The dragon himself is the eighth power in the sequence of powers opposing God and His people. The seven heads and ten horns are no longer crowned.

In what sense is the scarlet beast an eighth king? Who are his subjects? He is an eighth king in the sense that he still has a dominion over which he rules, but now he rules it directly rather than through his heads and horns, the earthly powers through which he previously acted in the earth. He attempted to exercise his dominion prior to the second coming of Christ, in the battle of Armageddon (16:13-16; 17:14; 19:19-21), but Christ had him thrown into the abyss. After the thousand years, however, he “will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations” (20:7-8), which will have been raised from the dead at the end of the thousand years (20:5, 13). Once again he will gather them under his leadership to attack the saints and the city of God (vv. 8-9). Thus, he demonstrates in the eschatological judgment period after the close of probation, namely, under the seven last plagues and beyond, that he himself is an eighth king, the real power behind the rulers of earth that had served as his heads in the historical period. In so doing, he demonstrates that he is fully deserving of final judgment (perdition) in the lake of fire (20:10).

The Ten Horns

Beginning in 17:12, John is given an explanation of the ten horns from his historical perspective but focusing on the final events. “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet,” John is told.⁶⁶ They are kings like the heads, but they are lesser kings, unlike the heads. And they do not rule consecutively but contemporaneously.⁶⁷

⁶³Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 55, says, “The vision itself is from the perspective of eschatological judgment when the beast ‘is not.’”

⁶⁴“Of the seven,” *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:856.

⁶⁵Ibid. See footnote 12.

⁶⁶Importantly, Tonstad, 252, observes that “the future orientation of these disclosures contests the view that almost everything in Revelation refers to realities that are contemporary to John.”

⁶⁷Fanning, 446, argues that they do not rule one after another stretching from the past into the future, like the seven heads, but “these ten exercise authority simultaneously ‘with the beast’ for a short period of time, for ‘one hour,’ and their rule has not yet begun: they ‘have not yet received ruling authority.’”

Verse 16 says that they are “on the beast,” but it should be assumed that they are on one of the heads of the beast, not attached directly without a head. But on which head? Based on the parallels with Daniel who, as we have seen, is John’s major source for understanding the seven heads historically, the ten horns are found on the fourth beast of Daniel 7.⁶⁸ They all arise from the sixth (Roman) head, but much later than John’s day.⁶⁹ We see in Daniel 7:7-8, 20, 24 and in Revelation 13:1 that they would arise and were crowned at a particular time in history, which was after the Roman empire was weakened by the barbarian invasions and shortly before the little horn, the sea beast, began its rise. That is when John saw them crowned with royal crowns in 13:1. Thus, John is told that they “have received no kingdom as yet,” in other words, in his day.⁷⁰ Of course, the ten barbarian tribes that brought down the western Roman empire do not still exist in that form at the end of time.⁷¹ They have morphed over time into the nations of Western Europe long before the end of time.⁷² These nations cannot be classified into ten divisions, yet there are still ten toes portrayed on the Daniel 2 image until the end (2:42), and Daniel describes the horns on the fourth beast in chapter 7 as ten, not seven. Western Europe was the center of Christianity for centuries, but by the end of history the ten horns likely merely represent the Old World powers that were once a part of the Holy Roman Empire. Alternatively, they may merely represent all of the minor earthly powers that continue to stand with the dragon past the close of probation into the eschatological judgment period.⁷³

⁶⁸Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 409-10, perceptively observes that the ten horns as ten kings in Rev 17:12 come from Dan 7:7, 20, 24. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus*, 526, similarly states, “This is an allusion to Daniel 7:7 and 24.” Yet, as for their identity, he adds, “Since the text does not reveal their identity, all we can conclude at this point is that they will emerge at the very end of time after the healing of the mortal wound of the beast.” See also Beale, 878; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, softback ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 257.

⁶⁹Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 105, cites the breakup of Rome by Germanic tribes in “the last half of the fourth century” as the historical fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. William H. Shea, *Daniel 7-12: Prophecies of the End Time*, Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 134, more clearly states that they were “kingdoms that arose out of the political and military turmoil occurring when imperial Rome broke up under the assaults of the barbarian tribes from the east and the north. This historical process took a couple of centuries to accomplish, beginning in the fifth century A.D. or even before.” He identifies the ten tribes and provides a map showing their locations in Western Europe (134-35). C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares, Vol. 1: The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1981), 123, gives an even more detailed account of the breakup of Rome in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. and names the same ten tribes as Shea does as Daniel’s ten horns. Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise: Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007), 280, says, “The ten horns represent the tribes that originated the nations of the western Europe of today.”

⁷⁰Oral Edmond Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus: An Introduction, Analysis, and Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), declares, “This prophecy cannot be transtemporal, as the language requires that it pertains to a time future to the time of writing.”

⁷¹Daniel 7:8, 20 tell us that three of the ten horns were plucked up or uprooted when the little horn rose up. Maxwell, *God Cares, Vol. 1*, 123, informs us that these three powers were the Arian tribes of the Heruls (also known as the Heruli), the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths. Shea, 138, names them as “the Ostragoths, the Vandals, and perhaps the Visigoths.” Z. Stefanovic, 280, identifies the same tribes as Maxwell and notes that Shea substitutes the Visigoths for the Heruli.

⁷²William H. Shea, *Daniel 7-12: Prophecies of the End Time*, Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 134, writes, “Eventually they evolved into what we now view as the modern nations of Europe.” See also Scoggins, 388.

⁷³The major powers are represented by heads, not horns, and five were already fallen in John’s day. Only the sixth head joined by the seventh continues until the end of history. These align themselves with the dragon as leaders in the final battle (Rev 16:13-14). Both go into the lake of fire at the time of the return of Christ, when He

The angel continues, “But they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” (v. 12). This is not referring to their historical reign but to a period at the time of Babylon’s judgment in which they receive authority for one hour⁷⁴ with the scarlet beast.⁷⁵ The horns are no longer crowned, and the beast is now acting as an eighth king for a very brief time just before Christ’s return, under the seventh bowl plague. The sea beast and the land beast are working with the dragon, the scarlet beast, to gather the kings and people of the earth to battle against God and His people (Rev 16:13-14; 17:14; 19:19). All of this is explained by the angel in 17:13-14.

Verse 13 explains that the ten horns “are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.” Daniel 2:42-44 describes how the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s image represent the very last powers of earth before the return of Christ: “In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (2:44). They will turn their rule over to the scarlet beast in a final attempt to fight against the rule of Christ in the earth. In order for the scarlet beast to become an eighth king following the rule of the seven kings, all earthly kings and kingdoms must cede their power to him, the great red dragon of Revelation 12:3. The crown of authority, as it were, will be placed on the scarlet beast as an eighth king, and all other authorities will bow to Satan’s rule on the earth. The final battle, “the great day of God Almighty,” commonly referred to as the battle of Armageddon, is very brief. Verse 14 says, “These make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” After introducing the same battle in the context of Christ’s return, 19:20 says, “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence . . . These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.”⁷⁶ This symbolizes final destruction (2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7).

Revelation 17:14 makes clear that when the ten horns “receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” (v. 12) and “give their power and authority to the beast” (v. 13), this is a reference to their participation in the final battle against Christ and His people: “These will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them.” They cannot win in battle, for the Lamb “is Lord of lords and King of kings” (cf. 19:16, 19-20). Those who are with the Lamb at that time are “called, chosen, and faithful,” otherwise known as saints, or holy people.⁷⁷ This is the same final battle described in 16:14 as “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” and also depicted in 19:19-20. Although there is a preparation and a gathering for battle (16:14, 16;

overcomes them as Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14; 19:19-20). If the ten horns are on the sixth head—Daniel’s fourth beast, Rome—they participate in the same events. John sees them before Christ’s return, making war with the Lamb, coming to hate the harlot, and ultimately participating actively in her destruction. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 164, says, “The 10 horns represent the last political world powers” who “fight the last battle of Armageddon.”

⁷⁴This is neither a prophetic hour nor a literal hour. The term “hour” in Greek normally refers to a moment in time or a very brief time, not sixty minutes (Matt 10:19; Mark 6:35; 13:11; Luke 22:53; John 2:4; 19:27; 1 Cor 15:30; Rev 3:3, 10; 11:13; 14:7; 18:10, 17, 19). See also Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 164; Reynolds, “Seventh Seal,” 83-84.

⁷⁵Mangina, 200, notes, “To receive authority means that one’s authority is derivative.” “Power is distributed toward the periphery” (201). He adds that “they are puppets of the beast, handing over to him even such authority as they do have, united with him in a covenant of heart and mind (17:13)” (200).

⁷⁶Satan himself would be cast alive into the bottomless pit for a thousand years, after which he would be released for a short time, then will go into the lake of fire, “where the beast and the false prophet are,” according to 20:3, 10.

⁷⁷Mangina, 202, says, “‘Those with him’ are, of course, the saints,” “the faithful.”

19:19), there is no actual battle described. Rather, “the Lamb will overcome them” (17:14), and the beast and the false prophet are “captured” and “cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (19:20). This is no physical battle in a physical location on earth. It is a spiritual battle concluding the war that began in heaven (12:7-9), has been carried on here on earth,⁷⁸ and will culminate in the final struggle described in 20:7-10. On one side is the dragon/scarlet beast, the kings and powerful people of earth, and the common people who choose to support the evil powers. On the other side is God, the Lamb, and those who “are called, chosen, and faithful” (17:14). “The Lamb will overcome” His adversaries, “for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.”

The Many Waters

In verse 15, the angel interprets for John the symbol of the waters on which the harlot sits: “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.” Ancient Babylon sat on the river Euphrates, which provided for Babylon’s safety and security, its water and agricultural needs, its transportation and communication needs, and so forth. This symbol we see also in 9:14 and 16:12. Now the symbol is interpreted to represent the individual peoples, population groups, nations, and languages that provide the support system for spiritual Babylon. In 17:2, “the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” Clearly, they are those who support what Babylon is doing. In preparation for the final battle, we are told in 16:12 that the water of “the great river Euphrates” will be “dried up, so the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.” This symbolic portrayal reminds the reader of the historical fall of Babylon to Cyrus and Darius, the kings from the east who dried up the waters of the Euphrates in order to enter Babylon under the river gates.⁷⁹ In the final spiritual struggle, however, the kings from the east will be Christ and His Father—the Ones who are coming (Matt 16:27; 26:64; Rev 1:4, 8; 2:25; 3:3, 11; 22:7, 12, 20)—with all their retinue of holy angels, and they will be victorious over the scarlet beast, the harlot, and the kings of the earth, and they will dry up the support of the people and the ten horns for the deceptions of Babylon.

The Judgment of the Harlot by God via the Ten Horns

Verse 16 returns to the activities of the ten horns under the seventh bowl plague. “And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her destitute and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.” This judgment on the harlot is very similar to the judgment on God’s professed but apostate people described in Ezekiel 16:37-41. The ten horns are seen as turning against the harlot who has brought them into a losing war against God.⁸⁰ They have been deceived into drinking the harlot’s wine and aligning themselves with the scarlet beast in its

⁷⁸Gen 3:1-6, 15; Matt 4:1-11; John 12:31-32; Rev 12:1-6, 10-17. Compare Isa 14:12-15.

⁷⁹Isa 44:27-28; 45:1-3; 46:11; Dan 5:1-5, 25-31. Artin Mehraban, “Reevaluating the Fall of Babylon,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 23, no. 4 (2024), <https://jmss.org/article/view/80861/57973>, accessed 17 April 2025, 113, after comparing the accounts of Herodotus, Berossus, Xenophon, the Nabonidus Chronicle, and Daniel, concludes, “Contrary to the previously established view [that Herodotus’ account is not trustworthy], Herodotus is not presenting fantasy nor should his account be dismissed. Much of what he describes is corroborated in the other material.” Paulien, 128-29, rehearses the account as told by Herodotus, treating it as authentic.

⁸⁰Were, 178, points out that this “determination to destroy the whore . . . refers to events to transpire under the 7th plague,” and that “as the kings destroy the Babylonian whore under the 7th plague it shows that they have not destroyed each other under the 6th plague in some supposed military conflict in far-away Palestine,” as some have postulated.

battle against the Lamb. Verse 17 explains why they have had a change of heart: “For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.” Again, this reflects the judgment on the harlot in Ezekiel 16: her attractiveness was turned to abhorrence (16:25), and God gave her up to the will of those who hate her (v. 27). God is behind the judgment on Babylon, but He uses her former lovers to bring judgment on her. False love (prostitution) turns to hatred in the end. And justice must be restored, as Revelation 18:6-8 says: “Render to her just as she rendered to you” (cf. 13:10; 16:6).

The Harlot Defined

Finally, the last verse of chapter 17, namely, verse 18, interprets the symbol of the harlot herself: “And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” “That great city” is a reference to Babylon, also called “that great city” in 14:8 and 18:10, 16, 19. Nebuchadnezzar had referred to his city as “this great Babylon” (Dan 4:30). No longer is Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon in view, however. This is spiritual Babylon, as we have seen. She reigns over the kings of the earth, the rulers of the nations. In context, these are none other than the seven heads and ten horns on which she is shown to be seated in verses 9-10.⁸¹ These seven heads, with the ten horns on the sixth head, cover most of human history. The first appearance of Babylon in Scripture is in Genesis 10:10, where Babel/Babylon is described as the beginning of the kingdom of Nimrod, a mighty hunter or rebel against the Lord.⁸² Then in Genesis 11, we have the story of the building of the city and tower of Babel in an act of deliberate rebellion against God.⁸³ If Abraham is seen to have been called out of Babylon—Ur of the Chaldees, “on the other side of the River”—because of the pagan influences there (Josh 24:2-3, 14-15), Babylon can be viewed as an anti-God spiritual influence even earlier than Egypt.⁸⁴ And if we take Revelation 18:24 seriously, the spirit of Babylon goes back even beyond the tower of Babel all the way to Cain’s murder of his brother Abel.⁸⁵ In other words, spiritual Babylon goes all the way back in history to the entrance of sin, which brought enmity and death (Rom 5:12, 14; 6:23). In any case, spiritual Babylon has reigned over the great empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and will have reigned over the United States of America when it begins to speak as a dragon and becomes a persecuting power like the nations before it. Spiritual Babylon is much bigger than any single historical entity or institution. It is coextensive with the scarlet beast and the beast’s seven heads and ten horns on which it is seated (17:3, 9-10). The harlot Babylon seems to represent the spirit of lawlessness and rebellion against God that characterizes Satan, his evil angels, and the leaders of nations and other institutions, including

⁸¹Beale, 878, after noting that “Dan. 7:7-8, 20, 24, is the source of the ‘ten horns,’” remarks, “The number ‘ten’ does not likely refer to ten literal kings but is figurative for the great power of these future kings This figurative idea of universal plenitude of power suggests that the ‘ten horns’ are identical to the kings of the earth in 17:18.” Although Daniel probably did not view them as figurative for universal plenitude, since three of the ten were taken down upon the rise of the “little horn” power, Beale is right in seeing these among the kings in Rev 17:18.

⁸²See Edwin Reynolds, “The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif in the Book of Revelation,” PhD diss., Andrews University, 1994, 140-42.

⁸³Ibid., 142-44.

⁸⁴Ibid., 144-46. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices*, 3d ed. ([New York]: Macmillan, [1909]; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1937), 229, mentions that Abram’s call out of Ur functions as a type of the call out of Babylon in Rev. 18:4.

⁸⁵Jesus used a similar expression regarding the responsibility of the Jewish nation for the blood of all the prophets killed, beginning with righteous Abel (Matt 23:34-35; Luke 11:49-51). See also Gen 4:8; 1 John 3:12.

churches, that reject God and persecute those who love God and are loyal to Him, even the people who support that spirit and cooperate with those powers and institutions. Since that same spirit controls Satan himself, it should not surprise us to see the harlot Babylon portrayed as seated on or controlling the scarlet beast itself and its seven heads and ten horns.

Because the harlot reigns over the kings and people of earth, they will manifest that spirit in their own actions, acting out the will of the dragon, including a readiness to slay God's faithful people. Since the spirit of Babylon is revealed in the various major powers in history that came into conflict with God's people, it is easy to confuse these powers with Babylon itself. When they act like Babylon, some will identify them as Babylon, but Babylon is much greater and more extensive through time than any individual power. It creates problems for interpretation whenever one loses sight of the distinction between Babylon and those powers over which she reigns. Because not only civil and religious powers can manifest the spirit of Babylon but even individuals can be controlled by the spirit of the harlot, it is well to keep in mind that it is really the spirit of Satan, the enemy of God and humanity, which is in control. When it controls a person, that person manifests the spirit of Babylon and can be identified with Babylon. When it controls a ruler or a nation, that ruler or nation can be identified with Babylon. When it controls a church or institution, that church or institution can be identified with Babylon.⁸⁶

Babylon clearly has a primarily anti-God motivation, a very satanic spirit.⁸⁷ It cannot adequately be identified as a secular civil power. It is blasphemous, speaking and acting against God, His plan for human redemption, and His chosen people. It cannot be equated with any of the beasts in Revelation. It is seated on the scarlet beast, the dragon, so it cannot be the scarlet beast or the dragon. It is seated on the heads (and horns) of the scarlet beast, ruling over them, so it cannot be either of the beasts in Revelation 13, which are the heads of the scarlet beast, the heads of the dragon.⁸⁸ It must be seen as independent from any of those other powers over which it rules or dominates. And because it rules over them, it is not controlled by them or functions as a subordinate element of any of them. It must not be viewed as any human or civil power but as a

⁸⁶See appendix for statements by Ellen G. White on what constitutes Babylon.

⁸⁷Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 161, says of Babylon, "She is neither a pagan nor a political power." Rather, "she incarnates both religiosity and Satan's desire to usurp God's role."

⁸⁸Edwin Reynolds, "Is Babylon the Papacy in the Book of Revelation?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 31, nos. 1-2 (2020): 70-78. Although the beast from the sea is first described as having seven heads and ten horns like the dragon, it is not the dragon, for it receives its power, throne, and great authority from the dragon (Rev 13:2). The main purpose of this description is to show that it is that phase of the dragon's work on earth that takes place after the ten horns are crowned (13:1). Those ten horns are on the sixth (Roman) head and anticipate the rise of Daniel's "little horn" power, which is what is represented by the beast from the sea. It is actually one of the heads of the dragon, which receives a deadly wound, but the deadly wound is healed (13:3) by the time the beast from the land begins to speak and act like a dragon (13:12, 14). When John says in 13:3, "I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded," "his heads" can find its antecedent in the dragon of verse 2: in other words, "one of the dragon's heads," which happens to be represented here as the beast from the sea that looks very much, from one perspective, like the dragon. The description of the activities of this power (13:4-8) match the activities of Daniel's "little horn," which "was given authority to continue for forty-two months" (v. 5). Most scholars agree that this period is the same as the "time, times, and half a time" of persecution of God's people (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14) and the 1260 days that is presented in the same way (Rev 11:2-3; 12:6), although not all agree on where this period falls historically. See Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 13, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 683-84; Schreiner, 468-69; Tonstad, 163. The latter author states, "It should be seen as a period for witness *and* as a time of persecution" (185).

controlling spirit that dominates even the dragon himself and any power or person that aligns itself/oneself with the dragon. It is the spirit of animosity toward God, His holy character, His laws and principles, His operations, His creation, and His faithful people. It animates every individual, group, or authority that refuses to surrender to the will and purpose of God.

In the end, Babylon will be judged and brought to destruction through the very will and purpose of God that she has fought against so long (17:16-17; 18:8), and heaven will rejoice at her demise (18:20; 19:1-3), while the kings and great men of the earth who sided with her and helped to make her rich and powerful will weep and wail when they see her sudden destruction knowing that their own destruction will follow promptly (18:9-19).

Besides the description of the harlot Babylon and her activities and judgment in Revelation 17-19, there are other references in Revelation that point to the comprehensive nature of the harlot and her activities. But before we go there, it would be well to remember her description in 17:5 as the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. If she is the mother and has daughters who are harlots, all of those daughter harlots would be partaking also of her spirit in different times and places. Thus, they would also be characterized as Babylon—not the mother Babylon, but her daughters. These would be engaged in a work similar to that of their mother. Because they have spirit of Satan, they, like their mother, can be associated with the heads and horns at different times and in different places, committing spiritual fornication with the kings and people of earth and causing them to drink of their wine and abominations of the earth.

In Revelation 2:20-24, the church of Thyatira is said to have a woman named Jezebel, recalling the harlot queen of Israel (cf. 2 Kgs 9:30), who not only is sexually immoral (Rev. 2:21) and commits adultery (v. 22) but also beguiles Jesus' servants to commit adultery with her (v. 20). She further has children who apparently are like her, because Jesus will kill them with death (v. 23), and she calls herself a prophetess (v. 20) and teaches the deep things of Satan (v. 24). The similarities between this Jezebel and the harlot of Revelation 17 are remarkable enough to draw parallels and lessons from them.⁸⁹ Jezebel appeared as an important figure in the Old Testament apostate nation of Israel, which was called the harlot Samaria in Ezekiel 16 and 23 and was considered to be a harlot in the book of Hosea because she was joined to idols despite Israel's covenant with God (Hos 4:17). She reappears as a harlot prophetess in first century Thyatira, beguiling believers into thinking that it is acceptable to commit sexual immorality and to eat things offered to idols (Rev 2:20) despite the experience of Israel at Baal Peor (Num 25:1-9) and the instructions of the Holy Spirit and the apostles at the first Jerusalem council (Acts 15:28-29). If the message to Thyatira applies also to the corrupt church in the Middle Ages, as some scholars believe,⁹⁰ that would be a further application of the message of Jesus regarding harlotry among His people.

The great city called Babylon in Revelation 17 is seen already in Revelation 11 under the

⁸⁹Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 44, says that Jezebel “functions as a forerunner to the great harlot Babylon, who will at the time of the end seduce the leaders of the world into the service of Satan.” Cf. Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2003), 83-96 (chap. 7: “The Women of Revelation: Binding ‘Jezebel’ to ‘Babylon’”).

⁹⁰Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, rev. ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1974), 31-32; Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 37-38; Maxwell, *God Cares*, 2:122-26; Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 45.

spiritual appellations of Sodom and Egypt (Rev 11:8), revealing that both Sodom and Egypt in the Old Testament were other representations of spiritual Babylon,⁹¹ and that there was another application at the end of the 1260 days/years during which the Two Witnesses prophesied clothed in sackcloth. They were killed in the street of the great city by the (scarlet) beast that ascends from the bottomless pit and goes to perdition, who is the dragon. This event took place during the French Revolution at the end of their 1260 years of prophesying.⁹² We see, then, that Babylon, the great harlot city, is found across the historical spectrum in a variety of situations and influencing various civil powers, including even atheistic powers like France during the French Revolution.

This spirit of harlotry seems to have a further application in the time of the end when the second angel's message of Revelation 14:8 is given as one of the last messages to the world before the close of probation. A messenger depicted as flying in midheaven is heard crying out, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath [*or* passion (*thymos*)] of her fornication." This announcement of a spiritual fall will eventually culminate in the physical fall announced in Revelation 18:2. The harlot Babylon is thus seen as already active also prior to the giving of the Three Angels' Messages under the Second Great Awakening when its fall began to be announced.⁹³

This diverse application of the imagery of the harlot, which is also the great city which rules over the kings of the earth and is responsible for the blood of all those slain (martyred) on the earth, certainly supports the idea that that Babylon is presented in Scripture as a very broad and comprehensive influence that cannot be limited to any single power or historical period. It must represent the spirit of Satan that rules over all earthly powers to cause them to rebel against God, to confuse and corrupt all who are not loyal to God and His word, and to persecute and kill those who remain faithful to God and His word. Individuals and powers may be characterized as having the spirit of Babylon and so become identified with Babylon, but they are not Babylon.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that Revelation 17 is an elaboration of the judgment on Babylon that takes place under the seventh bowl plague (17:1). The seventh bowl plague takes place after the close of probation (15:5-8; 16:17) and includes a judgment on the people and nations that have supported Babylon (16:19, 21; 19:21) immediately prior to the return of Jesus Christ (16:20; 19:6-7, 11-16). It is an eschatological vision, so it should be interpreted as taking place between the seventh bowl plague and the time of the final judgment in the lake of fire. The judgment on Babylon takes place under the seventh bowl plague, while the judgment on the scarlet beast takes place initially by its going into the bottomless pit/abyss for a thousand years (20:1-3), then finally after it comes up out of the abyss and goes to perdition in the lake of fire (20:10). The judgment of the people, great men, and kings of the earth likewise takes place in

⁹¹Reynolds, "Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif," 174-77.

⁹²Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 97-100; Maxwell, *God Cares*, 2:277, 280-92; Smith, 535-40; Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 131-32.

⁹³Maxwell, *God Cares*, 2:367-68; Smith, 651-62; Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, 389-90.

two phases: first, at their destruction at the second coming of Christ (19:17-21), then at the end of the thousand years by the lake of fire after they are raised in the second resurrection and attempt once again to attack and overthrow the camp of the saints and the beloved city (20:5, 8-9, 12-15). The primary focus of chapter 17 is the identification of the major players in the great conflict against God and His people and the reasons why they deserve judgment, especially the evil spirit that drives the conflict, namely the spiritual harlot city Babylon that sits on or reigns over the people that support her (17:1, 15), the kings of the earth (17:9-10, 12, 18), and the scarlet beast on which she is seated (17:3). The judgment itself is actually described primarily in chapter 18, to which we make references but we do not study in this paper.

The description of the harlot Babylon portrays her as a vile woman who, while clothed in beautiful and attractive garb to draw attention to herself (17:4; 18:16), is actually living as a seductress who wants to make people and kings drunk with the wine of her passionate immorality (14:8; 17:2; 18:3) by drinking from the golden cup in her hand which is full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication (17:4), causing them to share in her sins and receive of her plagues (18:4). She is the mother of other harlots and of the abominations of the earth (17:5), and she herself is drunk with the blood of the saints, prophets, and martyrs of Jesus (17:6; 18:24). She is actively involved in deceptive sorcery and demonic activity (18:2, 23), and she enriches herself by trading with the great men of the earth in not only expensive wares but even in the bodies and souls of men (18:3, 11-14, 23). She believes that she is so great as not to be held to account for her evil ways (18:7). Yet God will judge her for all these things (17:16-17; 18:8, 20-21; 19:2).

The scarlet beast is described in 17:8 as having a past active existence (“was”), which would rightly be viewed as its activity in history; as having an inactive existence in the present (“is not”), in which it is in the bottomless pit or abyss during the eschatological judgment period; as having a future active existence once again (“will ascend out of the bottomless pit” or “yet is” and “is himself also the eighth [king],” when it comes up from the bottomless pit; and finally, it “goes to perdition.” The precise parallels with the dragon in 20:1-3, 7-10 make it evident that the scarlet beast is actually another representation of the dragon, Satan. The dragon is the only beast that goes into the bottomless pit in Revelation, including in 11:7, where it is identified as “the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit,” a match with the scarlet beast of 17:8. In other words, the seven-headed, ten-horned scarlet beast is none other than the seven-headed, ten-horned great red dragon/serpent of 12:3-4, 9, 13-17 and 20:1-3, 7-10. It cannot be the beast from the sea, the imitation of the dragon in 13:1-8, to whom the dragon gives his power, throne, and great authority (13:2), since that beast is merely one of the heads of the dragon that is active after the ten crowned horns arise from Rome and then give way to the “little horn” power in the sixth century A.D. The scarlet beast, on the other hand, was active throughout history, working through empires like Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and a last-day unnamed empire (17:10, 18). The scarlet beast cannot be identified with any one of its heads, as many interpreters do. He himself becomes an eighth king—not a head—in the judgment period after the seven historical kings or kingdoms have completed their rule and “the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (11:15). God has him bound in the abyss for a thousand years where he can deceive the nations no more until the thousand years are ended, after which “he must be released for a little while” (20:3), to continue his work of deception until he is cast into the lake of fire (20:7-10).

The seven heads of the scarlet beast are kings or kingdoms—symbolized also as mountains (17:9-10)—that have been anti-God powers that have persecuted the people of God one after another from the time of Israel through the Christian era. Five had already fallen by John’s time (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece). One was active in John’s day and beyond (Rome, both pagan and papal), and one was yet to come toward the end of history and when it would come it must continue for a brief period. This seventh head is best understood as the beast from the land, the United States of America, which would ally itself with papal Rome in the end and enforce the worship of the papal beast from the sea and the image that would be made as a substitute for worshiping the beast itself (13:11-17). These seven heads are the kings of the earth that have submitted to the rule of the great harlot-city Babylon (17:18) and have drunk her wine and committed fornication with her (17:2; 18:3). They make war against God and His people⁹⁴ and will share in her judgment (16:19; 19:19-20).

The ten horns are also ten kings, but these are contemporaneous, not sequential like the heads. They had received no kingdom yet in John’s day (17:12), but would bring down the Roman empire during the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. when the papal Roman power would rise and dominate in the west (13:1), and they would receive authority as kings with the beast for a short time at the very end when the eschatological judgment of the seven last plagues takes place in preparation for the fall of Babylon under the seventh bowl plague (17:12-13). They participate in the final battle of the great day of God Almighty (16:13-14; 17:14; 19:19-20), making war with the Lamb and His followers, but they cannot win, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14). In the end, God puts it in their hearts to fulfill His purpose by turning to hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire (17:16-17; 18:8). As with the other kings who have aligned themselves with the scarlet beast and the harlot, they too will be judged at the return of Christ (Dan 2:44).

The many waters on which the harlot-city Babylon sits are said to represent peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (17:15). They are elsewhere represented as the waters of the Euphrates River (9:14; 16:12; cf. 18:21; Jer 51:43), which formed the support system for the ancient city of Babylon (Jer 51:13). These many peoples and nations are “the inhabitants of the earth” who were made drunk with the wine of Babylon’s fornication (17:2; 18:3). They, too, will be judged at the return of Christ (19:17-21) and again at the final, great white throne judgment (20:9, 11-15).

The interpreting angel returns at the end of chapter 17 to identify the harlot-city Babylon that was described earlier in terms of why she is in the wilderness facing judgment. “And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” (17:18). “The kings of the earth here” must be what they were earlier in the chapter, namely, the seven heads and ten horns on the scarlet beast, the four great powers that Daniel described in his visions as the enemies of God and His people, plus two earlier powers and one that would come later, near the end of human history. These seven powers are identified above. They stretch at least from the time of God’s calling of Abraham and his descendants to be His covenant people until the end of human history, and there is some evidence to suggest that spiritual Babylon was already present

⁹⁴Exod 1:13-16, 22; 14:5-9; 2 Kgs 17:5-6; 18:9-13; 25:1-11; Esth 3:8-15; 1 Macc 1:10-62; Dan 7:21-25; 8:23-25; Matt 2:16-18; 27:24-31; Rev 13:1-7, 11-17.

from the very beginning, even before the first institutions and powers developed (18:4; Gen 10:10; 11:4-9). Spiritual Babylon cannot be Jerusalem, Rome, the papacy, apostate Protestantism, a last-day antichrist power, or any other single entity in time, as various interpreters have proposed. Babylon is coextensive with the dragon that she rides, at least on earth. It is best seen to be representative of the spirit of the dragon that infects the various heads and horns through which the dragon acts on earth. Every power that the dragon uses to attack God, His Son, His name (reputation or character), His word, His law, His justice, His sanctuary, His people, His plan of salvation, His mode of worship, and any other aspect of God that the dragon opposes, is under the influence of the spirit of Babylon. As such, people may identify them as Babylon, but while they are acting under the influence of the wine of Babylon, they are not Babylon itself. Biblically, Babylon must be greater than any of these lesser powers, for she reigns over all of them (17:18), and she is ultimately responsible for the blood of all who have been martyred on the earth (18:24). God calls all who find themselves still living under the influence of Babylon to come out (18:4), for her judgment is certain. “Her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (18:5).

APPENDIX

Ellen G. White Statements on the Identity of Babylon

Testimonies for the Church, 1:270 (1861): (Confused Seventh-day Adventist churches in Central New York in 1861)

August 3, 1861, I was shown that some have feared that our churches would become Babylon if they should organize; but those in central New York have been perfect Babylon, confusion. And now unless the churches are so organized that they can carry out and enforce order, they have nothing to hope for in the future; they must scatter into fragments. Previous teachings have nourished the elements of disunion. A spirit has been cherished to watch and accuse, rather than to build up.

Early Writings, 277-78 (1882): (Protestant American churches rejecting Bible truth since 1844)

The message of the fall of Babylon, as given by the second angel, is repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the churches since 1844. The work of this angel comes in at the right time to join in the last great work of the third angel's message as it swells to a loud cry. And the people of God are thus prepared to stand in the hour of temptation, which they are soon to meet. I saw a great light resting upon them, and they united to fearlessly proclaim the third angel's message.

Angels were sent to aid the mighty angel from heaven, and I heard voices which seemed to sound everywhere, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." This message seemed to be an addition to the third message, joining it as the midnight cry joined the second angel's message in 1844. The glory of God rested upon the patient, waiting saints, and they fearlessly gave the last solemn warning, proclaiming the fall of Babylon and calling upon God's people to come out of her that they might escape her fearful doom.

Spirit of Prophecy, 4:232-33 (1884): (Signifies confusion, as in Babel; is applied in Scripture to various forms of false or apostate religion; previously Rome, the mother apostate church, but cannot be the Romish church in the context of the second angel's message; appropriate to the Protestant churches in 1844)

The term Babylon, derived from Babel, and signifying confusion, is applied in Scripture to the various forms of false or apostate religion. But the message announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to some religious body that was once pure, and has become corrupt. It cannot be the Romish Church which is here meant; for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. But how appropriate the figure as applied to the Protestant churches, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects. The unity for which Christ prayed does not exist. Instead of one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there are numberless conflicting creeds and theories. Religious faith appears so confused and discordant that the world know not what to believe as truth. God is not in all this; it is the work of man,--the work of Satan.

In Revelation 17, Babylon is represented as a woman, a figure which is used in the Scriptures as the symbol of a church. A virtuous woman represents a pure church, a vile woman an apostate church. Babylon is said to be a harlot; and the prophet beheld her drunken with the blood of saints and martyrs. The Babylon thus described represents Rome, that apostate church which has so cruelly persecuted the followers of Christ. But Babylon the harlot is the mother of daughters who follow her example of corruption. Thus are represented those churches that cling to the doctrines and traditions of Rome and follow her worldly practices, and whose fall is announced in the second angel's message.

Spirit of Prophecy, 4:421-22 (1884): (Corrupt churches since 1844 rejecting truth; the teachings of Spiritualism—belief in spiritual manifestations)

In this scripture [Rev 18:1, 2, 4] the announcement of the fall of Babylon, as made by the second angel, is repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the churches since 1844. A terrible condition of the religious world is here described. With every rejection of truth, the minds of the people have become darker, their hearts more stubborn, until they are entrenched in an infidel hardihood. In defiance of the warnings which God has given, they continue to trample upon one of the precepts of the decalogue, and they persecute those who hold it sacred. Christ is set at naught in the contempt placed upon his word and his people. As the teachings of Spiritualism are accepted by the churches, no real restraint is imposed upon the carnal heart, and the profession of religion becomes a cloak to conceal the basest iniquity. A belief in spiritual manifestations opens the door to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. The influence of evil angels is felt in the churches throughout the land.

Of Babylon at this time it is declared, "Her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." She has filled up the measure of her guilt, and destruction is about to fall upon her. But God still has a people in Babylon; and before the visitation of his judgments, these faithful ones must be called out, that they "partake not of her sins, and receive not of her plagues." Hence the movement symbolized by the angel coming down from Heaven, lightening the earth with his glory, and crying mightily with a strong voice, announcing the sins of Babylon. In connection with his message the call is heard, "Come out of her, my people." As these warnings join the third angel's message, it swells to a loud cry.

Great Controversy, 382-83 (1888): (The Jewish church, the see of Rome, and the State churches all seeking the support of worldly powers; religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt; the 2d angel's message cannot refer to the Romish church but applies especially to the confused Protestant churches in which the greater part of the followers of Christ are now found)

The woman, Babylon, of Revelation 17, is described as "arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness. . . . And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots." Says the prophet, "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." Babylon is further declared to be "that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." The power that for so many centuries maintained despotic sway over the monarchs of Christendom, is Rome. The purple and scarlet color, the gold and precious stones and pearls, vividly picture the magnificence and more than kingly pomp affected by the haughty see of Rome. And no other power could be so truly declared "drunken with the blood of the saints" as that church which has so cruelly persecuted the followers of Christ. Babylon is also charged with the sin of unlawful connection with "the

kings of the earth.” It was by departure from the Lord, and alliance with the heathen, that the Jewish church became a harlot; and Rome, corrupting herself in like manner by seeking the support of worldly powers, receives a like condemnation.

Babylon is said to be “the mother of harlots.” By her daughters must be symbolized churches that cling to her doctrines and traditions, and follow her example of sacrificing the truth and the approval of God, in order to form an unlawful alliance with the world. The message of Revelation 14 announcing the fall of Babylon, must apply to religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt. Since this message follows the warning of the Judgment, it must be given in the last days, therefore it cannot refer to the Romish Church, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation, in a message which is yet future, the people of God are called upon to come out of Babylon. According to this scripture, many of God's people must still be in Babylon. And in what religious bodies are the greater part of the followers of Christ now to be found? Without doubt, in the various churches professing the Protestant faith. At the time of their rise, these churches took a noble stand for God and the truth, and his blessing was with them. Even the unbelieving world was constrained to acknowledge the beneficent results that followed an acceptance of the principles of the gospel. In the words of the prophet to Israel, “Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.” But they fell by the same desire which was the curse and ruin of Israel,—the desire of imitating the practices and courting the friendship of the ungodly. “Thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown.”

Many of the Protestant churches are following Rome's example of iniquitous connection with “the kings of the earth;” the State churches, by their relation to secular governments, and other denominations by seeking the favor of the world. And the term Babylon—confusion—may be appropriately applied to these bodies, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects, with widely conflicting creeds and theories.

Besides a sinful union with the world, the churches that separated from Rome present other of her characteristics.

Review and Herald, Sep. 12, 1893: (The fallen denominational churches, teaching false doctrines such as the immortality of the soul, the eternal torment of the wicked, the denial of the pre-existence of Christ, and exalting the first day of the week above God's holy Sabbath)

We are not to think that the chosen ones of God who are trying to walk in the light, compose Babylon. The fallen denominational churches are Babylon. Babylon has been fostering poisonous doctrines, the wine of error. This wine of error is made up of false doctrines, such as the natural immortality of the soul, the eternal torment of the wicked, the denial of the pre-existence of Christ prior to his birth in Bethlehem, and advocating and exalting the first day of the week above God's holy, sanctified day. These and kindred errors are presented to the world by the various churches, and thus the Scriptures are fulfilled that say, 'For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' It is a wrath which is created by false doctrines, and when kings and presidents drink this wine of the wrath of her fornication, they are stirred with anger against those who will not come into harmony with the false and Satanic heresies which exalt the false Sabbath, and lead men to trample under foot God's memorial.

Great Controversy, 606-7 (1911): (The church, fallen because of her errors and sins, because of her rejection of the truth)

Thus the message of the third angel will be proclaimed. As the time comes for it to be given with greatest power, the Lord will work through humble instruments, leading the minds of those who consecrate themselves to His service. The laborers will be qualified rather by the unction of His Spirit than by the training of literary institutions. Men of faith and prayer will be constrained to go forth with holy zeal, declaring the words which God gives them. The sins of Babylon will be laid open. The fearful results of enforcing the observances of the church by civil authority, the inroads of spiritualism, the stealthy but rapid progress of the papal power—all will be unmasked. By these solemn warnings the people will be stirred. Thousands upon thousands will listen who have never heard words like these. In amazement they hear the testimony that Babylon is the church, fallen because of her errors and sins, because of her rejection of the truth sent to her from heaven. As the people go to their former teachers with the eager inquiry, Are these things so? the ministers present fables, prophesy smooth things, to soothe their fears and quiet the awakened conscience. But since many refuse to be satisfied with the mere authority of men and demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord," the popular ministry, like the Pharisees of old, filled with anger as their authority is questioned, will denounce the message as of Satan and stir up the sin-loving multitudes to revile and persecute those who proclaim it.

Manuscript Releases, 1:362 (n.d.): (The churches who will not receive the messages of warning the Lord has given in the first, second, and third angel's messages; churches exalting the false Sabbath and the immortality of the soul; kings, merchants, rulers, and religious teachers)

The whole chapter [Rev 18] shows that Babylon that has fallen is the churches who will not receive the messages of warning the Lord has given in the first, second, and third angel's messages. They refused the truth and accepted a lie. They refused the messages of truth. See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. The message in the eighteenth chapter of Revelation is plain and clearly defined. "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies" (Revelation 18:3). Anyone who reads this chapter need not be deceived.

How Satan would exult to have a message go broadcast that the only people whom God has made the repositories of His law are the ones to whom this message applies. The wine of Babylon is the exalting of the false and spurious Sabbath above the Sabbath which the Lord Jehovah hath blessed and sanctified for the use of man, also the immortality of the soul. These kindred heresies, and the rejection of the truth, convert the church into Babylon. Kings, merchants, rulers, and religious teachers are all in corrupt harmony.

Story of Redemption, 364-65 (1947 compil.): (Churches rejecting the advent message in 1844)

When the churches spurned the counsel of God by rejecting the advent message, the Lord rejected them. The first angel was followed by a second, proclaiming, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Revelation 14:8. This message was understood by Adventists to be an announcement of the moral fall of the churches in consequence of their rejection of the first message. The proclamation, "Babylon is fallen," was given in the summer of 1844, and as the result, about fifty thousand withdrew from these churches.

Summary

Ellen G. White points to a large variety of applications for Babylon, including “the Jewish church,” “the see of Rome,” “State churches seeking the support of worldly powers,” churches rejecting the advent message in 1844, apostate Protestant churches since 1844, any churches exalting false teachings, and even “kings, merchants, rulers, and religious teachers.” Her focus is clearly her own day, getting her readers to identify applications of Babylon in their own day. This is very understandable, but it does not make these the only applications of spiritual Babylon over time, as we see in Revelation 17. Her identifications are broad enough to allow for understanding the harlot-city Babylon as a satanic spirit closely associated with the great red dragon that attempts to deceive the inhabitants of the earth and the rulers and great men of the earth into doing the work of the dragon, fighting against God, His Messiah, His people, and all that they stand for. When apostate religious powers unite with civil authorities to wage war against God and His people, they are doing the work of the dragon. They are under the deceptive influence of the wine of the harlot, that great city that reigns over the kings of the earth. God calls it Babylon.