

# REVELATION 17

## AN APOCALYPSE MYSTERY

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**ABSTRACT:** Revelation 17's complex symbology challenges the interpreter: the harlot woman, the beast, its seven heads, its ten horns, its eighth head, the "many waters," and the bottomless pit. We identify each symbol by exegeting each verse, then validating our findings by harmonizing them with world history. A key element is determining the reference point from which the angel gives his explanation, which we identify as the time of John. The harlot portrays history's principal religious institution in illicit relationship with earth's kings; her final form being papal Rome. The beast portrays history's principal political empires Satan employs in his war against God, and its heads represent these empires individually as the war progresses. The imagery of "many waters" locates the depicted history of both harlot and beast in earth's Old World. The bottomless pit represents the beast's abode while Satan wars covertly through pagan empires, and when out of the pit he wars overtly through self-declared atheistic empires. The ten horns represent ten eschatological political divisions of the Old World that God employs to execute final judgment on the harlot. Revelation 17 demonstrates God's total foreknowledge of human history and assures the reader of the ultimate destruction of prophetic history's harlot.

1. Who is the great whore, the Mother of Harlots, and that great city?  
Ans: Prophetic history's principal adulterous church unfaithful to God's holy covenant.
2. Who is the scarlet-colored beast?  
Ans: Prophetic history's principal political empires Satan employs to oppose God's kingdom.
3. What do the seven heads/mountains/kings represent?  
Ans: The sequential world empires of Pharaoh's Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome (both imperial and papal phases), and Napoleon's France.
4. What do the ten horns represent?  
Ans: Ten eschatological political divisions of the beast manifested collectively as its 8<sup>th</sup> head.
5. What is the timeframe in prophetic history?  
Ans: The time of John, about A.D. 96.
6. Is there biblical proof for each answer above?  
Ans: Biblical evidence is provided for each answer.
7. Can the answers above be reconciled with Sister White's writings?  
Ans: There are no conflicts with Sister White's writings.

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## The Context (vs. 1–2)

The context of Rev 17 is given in its first two verses:<sup>1</sup>

**AND there came one of the seven angels [of chs. 15–16] which had the seven vials [of the seven last plagues of ch. 16], and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:**

**2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.**

This particular revelation is appropriately given by one of the seven angels of Rev 15–16 in that all three chapters relate the execution of judgment — chapters 15–16 deal with the judgment of the world via the seven last plagues; chapter 17 deals with “the judgment of the great whore.” But while it is one of the angels of judgment who relates the final [negative] judgment on the whore, in our view it is *only* this judgment, described in vs. 16–17, that needs to be placed at the very end of time. That is, the information regarding the woman in verses 3–6, and then the related supplementary information that follows, is merely given to identify who “the great whore” is by placing her in her historical context. Thus, we need not relegate all of what we see in Rev 17 to the time period surrounding the seven last plagues. We will also note that in Rev 21:9–22:5 one of these seven angels of judgment describes the final home and experience (*i.e.*, the final [positive] judgment) of “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (v. 9), and the time period here is the end of the millennium. Thus we see that the events described by any of these seven angels are not necessarily limited to the time of the seven last plagues immediately preceding the eschaton.

## The Woman (vs. 3–6)

The most significant clues we have regarding the identity of “the great whore” are in vs. 3–6:

**3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.**

**4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:**

**5 And upon her forehead *was* a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**

**6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the**

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotes are from the KJV.

**martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.**

The Spirit of Prophecy identifies this woman as the Roman Church.

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 drunk 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.” Revelation 17:4–6, 18. 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 the 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. *The Great Controversy*, 382.

For matter of clarification, it should be noted that the “Babylon . . . that great city” of the second angel’s message (Rev 14:8) and the “Babylon the great” of the fourth angel’s message (Rev 18:1–3) encompass more than the “BABYLON THE GREAT” of Rev 17:5.

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 Roman Church alone, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation the people of God are called 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. *Ibid.*, 382–383 (emphasis original).

While the Babylon of Rev 14:8 and 18:2 includes apostate Protestantism, it is important to keep in mind that the *woman* of Rev 17 — the BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS — is specifically, in her final form, papal Rome. And because the prophecies of Dan 7 and 8 plainly tell us that beasts in prophecy represent kings or kingdoms,<sup>2</sup> we can also identify the seven-headed “scarlet coloured beast” of Rev 17:3 as the world’s political powers. That the papacy engages in an adulterous

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<sup>2</sup> Dan 7:17, 23; 8:20–22.

relationship with these political powers is depicted by the fornication mentioned in v. 2 and in v. 3 by the fact that the woman is sitting on the beast, and that the people of the earth are bewitched by the fruit of this relationship is shown by their drunkenness in v. 2.

The papacy herself is actually a quasi-pagan power in that she is “a skillful blend of paganism with Christianity” (7BC 749). Thus, the root of papal Rome is common to that of imperial Rome — paganism. This is why both powers are represented by the prophetic little horn of Dan 8. But for the most part, the other world political powers were also characteristically pagan in that they also fostered the multifaceted pagan religion of the masses. But when papal Rome as an overtly *ecclesiastical* organization was formally vested with *political* authority, she became a unique *religio-political form of pagan power*. And in this we have a *church* with *kingly* power.<sup>3</sup> This unique religio-political form of paganism, then, can cause the papacy to be viewed as the politically empowered “queen” of paganism. Indeed, she views herself in just such an exalted position. Revelation 18:7:

**7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.**

Consistent with this view, prophecy identifies papal Rome as “that woman Jezebel” (Rev 2:20); Jezebel historically being the pagan wife of Ahab, king of Israel. But while the papacy is queen of the pagan world, the paganism she is queen of most assuredly predates her by a long way. Revelation 17 recognizes this in that the papacy is given the name “BABYLON THE GREAT” (v. 5) and in that “the woman . . . is that great city” — *Babylon* (v. 18). Thus we have prophecy describing the papacy as *spiritual Babylon*, indicating a commonality between *ancient* Babylon and the papacy.<sup>4</sup> And in our

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<sup>3</sup> This is well illustrated today by the fact that Vatican City, established in 1929 by the Lateran Treaty, is actually officially called Vatican City State. Its mere 110 acres makes it the smallest recognized country in the world.

<sup>4</sup> This is particularly evident when we compare Rev 18 with Isa 47 — *e.g.*, Rev 18:7 quotes spiritual Babylon: “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow,” and Isa 47:7–8 quotes ancient Babylon: “I will be a queen [*g<sup>e</sup>beret*] forever . . . I will not sit as a widow, Nor know the loss of children” (NASB; *g<sup>e</sup>beret* = “queen” also in NIV, LSB, NET, NLT, BBE, AMP). And Rev 18 likens spiritual Babylon’s demise to the figurative casting of a stone into the sea: “Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all” (v. 21). And Jer 51 likens ancient Babylon’s demise to the casting of a stone into the Euphrates: “Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her” (v. 64). Interestingly, historical Jezebel’s demise was similar, though literal. “And he [*Jehu*] said, Throw her down. So they threw her down . . . and he trode her under foot” (2 Kgs 9:33).

view, the principal point in common is found in the fact that both ancient Babylon and papal Rome were (and in the case of papal Rome, will be again) political/apostate religious [pagan-at-the-core] powers. Both powers openly espoused and practiced an apostate church–state union that ultimately culminated in a politically enforced religious law. In respect to ancient Babylon, this law was the law requiring the worship of Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image.<sup>5</sup> In respect to papal Rome, this law was a religious Sunday law coming historically in the Middle Ages, then eschatologically through papal Rome’s daughters.<sup>6</sup> Thus we have the papacy (and in the larger context apostate Protestantism) being referred to in prophecy as mystical BABYLON THE GREAT (the *woman/church* who forsakes her true husband, the Creator Christ) and plays the harlot by joining herself in an adulterous relationship to the prophetic *political beast powers* of this world. This she does despite Christ’s plain disavowal of His kingdom being involved with political powers, saying, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). But even though *she* doesn’t know it, *we* know, according to the judgment described in Rev 17:16–17 and 18:8–24, that at the end of the eschatological period of papal supremacy the papacy will not only be divorced by this beast power again but physically abused again in the process.

But the roots of end-time spiritual Babylon go even deeper than to the city Nebuchadnezzar built — Babylon — in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.<sup>7</sup> This is because ancient Babylon had its own roots going all the way back to the city Nimrod built — Babel — with its infamous Tower.<sup>8</sup> And the city of Babel came to be called Babylon. Thus, while the Spirit of Prophecy identifies papal Rome as the “BABYLON THE GREAT” of Rev 17, we understand papal Rome to merely be the final historical manifestation of “that great city” of organized religious rebellion against God.

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<sup>5</sup> See Dan 3.

<sup>6</sup> While papal Rome prostituted herself with imperial Rome, her daughters will do so with the second beast of Rev 13.

<sup>7</sup> Dan 4:30: “The king spake, and said, is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?”

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gen. 10:8–10; 11:1–9. Nimrod was a great grandson of Noah. Estimates of when the Tower of Babel was built range from 1000–1500 years before the time of the Babylonian Empire.

### The Angel's Explanation (vs. 7–13)

Though the purpose of Rev 17, according to v. 1, is to show “the judgment of the great whore,” by the representation of the beast it also provides significant information about the world’s political powers, particularly as they are used by God in the last days to bring judgment on the whore. Verse 7 explicitly tells us that the rest of Rev 17 is intended to unravel the mystery of this woman and the beast she sits on:

**7 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.**

We have already identified and demystified the woman; the description of the beast, however, just deepen the mystery. Let’s look at this description in vs. 8–13:

**8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.**

**9 And here *is* the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.**

**10 And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.**

**11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.**

**12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.**

**13 These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.**

Obviously, the beast of Rev 17 represents multiple political powers as depicted by its seven heads and ten horns. We are told in v. 9 that the seven heads are “seven mountains.” So what do mountains represent in Bible prophecy? The following prophecy against ancient Babylon provides an answer. Jeremiah 51:24–26:

**24 And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD.**

**25 Behold, I *am* against thee (Babylon), O destroying mountain, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain.**

**26 And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate forever, saith the LORD.**

While this prophecy assures prophecy students today that any modern-day ambition to rebuild

ancient Babylon will never be realized, it also reveals that the Lord likens political kingdoms to mountains, and this representation can be applied to the seven mountains of Rev 17. This is affirmed by Rev 17 itself in that v. 10 tells us the seven heads are not only seven *mountains* but also seven *kings*. Comments of the *SDA Bible Commentary* on v. 10:

**10. And there are seven kings.** Or, “*and seven kings are they.*” These “kings” are not in addition to the “heads” and the “mountains,” but, presumably, identified with them. How much distinction, if any, is intended between the “kings” and the “mountains” is not clear. *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:855 (emphasis supplied).

The seven kings *must* be identified with the seven heads/mountains else they would have no corresponding part in the symbol of the woman and the beast. That is, in v. 7 the angel expressly states that he is going to explain the prophetic representation of the woman and the seven-headed beast he had just shown John in vs. 3–6. The angel then explains in v. 9 that the seven heads represent seven mountains; he explains further in v. 10 “and seven kings are they” — *i.e.*, “the seven heads also represent seven kings.” But he also explains in v. 12 that the ten *horns* are *also* ten *kings*; thus, we understand that the symbols of the seven heads/mountains and the ten horns represent political kings/kingdoms in world history. Regarding the mountains, this harmonizes with Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Dan 2 where *God’s* coming literal kingdom is described as “a great mountain” (v. 35). And regarding the heads and horns, this harmonizes with the parallel we find in Daniel’s visions of chapters 7 and 8 regarding the four-way division of the Greek Empire. In chapter 7 this four-way division is represented by the four *heads* of the leopardlike beast (v. 6), and in chapter 8 it is represented by the four *horns* of the he goat (v. 8). Thus, Bible prophecy employs mountains and heads and horns of beasts interchangeably to represent political kingdoms.

Though we have identified the seven mountains as seven political kingdoms in world history, this view does not necessarily discredit the literal interpretation that sees these mountains “on which the woman sitteth” (v. 8) as depicting the seven literal hills on which the city of Rome is built. While it is entirely appropriate for Rome to be built on seven hills, we find this itself to be but a graphic

symbolic portrayal of the primary fulfillment of Rev 17's seven mountains which v. 9 plainly equates with the seven heads of the beast, and there is no precedence in Bible prophecy that heads of beasts are employed to represent merely literal mountains or hills.

Regarding the various kings of Rev 17, it is apparent that the primary difference between the seven kings and the ten kings is that the seven kings are seven consecutive world political powers (one following the other) while the ten kings are ten contemporary political powers (they co-exist). This is evident in that concerning the seven kings we are told that "five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come" (v. 10), and concerning the ten kings that they together would "receive power as kings one hour with the beast" (v. 12).

Adding to the complexity of this prophetic picture, v. 8 tells us that the beast itself "was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit." Here we see that the beast itself has three principal periods of existence in world history: (1) out of the bottomless pit; (2) in the bottomless pit; and (3) out of the bottomless pit again just before going into perdition. But the heads on this beast simultaneously represent the seven principal political powers of world history. Therefore, it is apparent that the beast itself takes on characteristics distinct from those of the political powers represented by its seven heads. Yet v. 11 tells us that the *beast* is *also* the *eighth head*. Now we must also determine how and why there is an eighth head on a prophetic beast that was originally described as having only seven.

Having identified the woman of Rev 17 as the principal apostate *religious* element in world prophetic history, we are now faced with identifying each of the principal *political* elements of this chapter which are: (1) the beast and, because they are one and the same according to v. 11, its eighth head; (2) each of its seven heads; and (3) its ten horns. We will begin with the seven heads.



### The Seven Heads (v. 10)

The most significant clues we have regarding the identity of the seven heads are in v. 10:

**10 And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.**

This verse plainly states that five kings are *past*, one king is *present*, and one king is *future*; and according to Inspiration, “The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed” (GC 599). Thus, if we employ the generally accepted practice of interpreting prophecy literally except where there is obvious symbolism, the best option we have in determining the point of reference for this past-present-future sequence is the point in time when this prophecy was given to the apostle John in about A.D. 96. But it is precisely at this juncture in the study of Rev 17 where prophecy students diverge in very different directions, for where we identify the chapter’s time reference point drastically affects our interpretation of what follows.

Opposing our position on the time reference point is a popular view holding that this point is actually far into the future from John’s day. This is derived from John’s testimony in v. 3 that he was “carried ... away in the spirit into the wilderness,” and this is understood to mean that everything John subsequently saw and heard was from the perspective of whatever future time and place it was that he was carried away to. We argue against this view for two principal reasons: (1) in this alternative view one must still resort to speculating the time John was carried away to;<sup>9</sup> and (2) in v. 7 the angel of judgment informed John that he was going to explain the mystery of the revelation of vs. 3–6, and there is no reason to believe that the *explanation* of the mystery is part and parcel of the

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<sup>9</sup> The time John was carried to must also be during the time the beast is in its “is not” (v. 8) state, and this time is, for some, equated with the time when the seven-headed beast of Rev 13 has a “deadly wound” (Rev 13:3) and, for others, the millennium of Rev 20 when Satan is bound in “the bottomless pit” (Rev 20:3). The reason for the widely differing interpretations here is due to the fact that both applications are based more on presumptions than the textual evidence. But it is never a good idea to come to an interpretation based on which possible scenario, among many, best fits the prophetic picture. We should come to our interpretation by taking the text at face value so as to let the text itself lead us to the correct interpretation.

mystery itself. We understand that John being carried away in the spirit to the wilderness was for the purpose of showing him the visionary and highly symbolic picture of vs. 3–6, but the angel’s verbal explanation of vs. 7–18 was in John’s real time and place. In our view, we should expect the explanation to be given in terms the one to whom it was specifically addressed could understand; one requiring no speculative interpretation on the part of John. Therefore, we conclude that the first five kings were *past* relative to A.D. 96, the sixth king was *present* in A.D. 96, and the seventh king was *future* relative to A.D. 96. In our view, moving the reference point to any other time in history is unjustifiable and cannot be done without departing from what the prophecy states in pure and simple language. And because no biblical/exegetical evidence can be set forth that justifies moving this reference point, relocating this point cannot be done without inserting a great degree of one’s own private interpretation into the text.

When the time reference point being the time of John is accepted, it becomes quickly apparent that the sixth of the seven heads is the power of imperial Rome as this was the world political power existing at the time John was given his vision. And with this as a reference point, it is now simple enough to look back and identify the first five heads as they were the five Old-World political powers preceding the power of Rome. Therefore, we conclude that the first six heads of the beast of Rev 17 respectively represent the empires of:

Egypt — Assyria — Babylon — Medo-Persia — Greece — Rome

A variant of this view is to begin the sequence with Medo-Persia and attributing to Greece four heads. Rationale for this stems from Dan 7 which depicts the Greek Empire as a leopard with four heads (the heads representing the four divisions of the Greek empire after Alexander’s death).<sup>10</sup> Thus, the empires of Medo-Persia and Greece together are understood to be the five heads that “are fallen” in Rev 17. But we argue against this view as well. First, this view elevates the four generals who

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<sup>10</sup> Dan 7:6.

superseded Alexander above Alexander himself, yet Alexander's historical prominence far surpassed any of his subordinate generals. Second, four *divisions* of any one empire should not be counted as equivalent to the other world empires that remained fully intact throughout the course of their respective reigns. Third, Greece is represented in Dan 8 as a goat which has but one head,<sup>11</sup> so by what exegetical rule should we select Dan 7's leopard over Dan 8's goat when counting heads in Rev 17?

That history bears record that the Egyptian Empire was the first of the major political powers in the postdiluvian world and the empire existing at the time God called Abram to be Abraham and the father of God's chosen people, and that the Roman Empire was the sixth power and the one in existence at the time the Revelation was given to John testifies that our rationale in coming to the above sequence of Rev 17's heads is correct.<sup>12</sup>

It might be asked: *Why do the heads of the beast of Rev 17 depict the political powers going all the way back to Egypt when the prophecies of Dan 7 and 8 respectively begin with the empires of Babylon and Medo-Persia?* That the prophecies of Dan 7 and 8 were given just fourteen and nine years respectively before the fall of Babylon and the rise of Medo-Persia indicates that the principal purpose of Daniel's prophecies was to foretell the future; thus, the past was ignored. In the prologue to Dan 11–12, Gabriel expressly stated in Dan 10:14 that the purpose of his appearance to Daniel was to reveal future events. On the other hand, the purpose of the prophetic picture of Rev 17 is to show the final judgment of "the great whore" of Bible prophecy, doing so by first portraying just how this harlot woman fits in to the Christ vs. Satan controversy as it plays out over the entire history of God's church. Thus, it should be expected that the prophetic symbol of the seven-headed beast of Revelation would begin at the beginning — with the first great postdiluvian political power in world

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<sup>11</sup> Dan 8:5

<sup>12</sup> The Andrews Study Bible note on Rev 17:10 concurs with this sequence of empires.

history, to which Abraham sought relief from famine, and to when the twelve tribes of Israel had their own beginnings and when all other countries came to buy corn in the time of Joseph, and when Egypt's Pharaoh constituted a "type" of the antagonist in earth's great controversy between Christ and Satan as portrayed in the Exodus story.

It might also be asked: *How can the woman on the beast be identified as papal Rome when the heads of the beast date all the way back to Egypt?* That is, *what relationship did papal Rome have with Egypt? Or for that matter, with Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, or Greece?* The papacy's direct relationship is only with the sixth head of Rome; her indirect relationship, however, does include all the previous powers.

First, we note again that, in our view, papal Rome is merely the end-time manifestation of the harlot. That is, the harlot manifested herself in human history in forms that preceded her papal form, all of which were cultic religious institutions that could generally be described with the expression "idolatrous paganism." We also note again that the papacy can be viewed as the queen of the pagan world and that she identifies particularly with the former pagan kingdom of Babylon, even to the extent that Rev 17 describes her with the name BABYLON THE GREAT on her forehead.<sup>13</sup> Her unique status as the only religio-political power portrayed in Bible prophecy, then, and her [pagan] identification with the world political powers that preceded her (inasmuch as she joined in union with her contemporary pagan political power — imperial Rome), makes portraying the papacy as a woman riding on the pagan beast of world political powers entirely appropriate. Though five of these powers preceded her chronologically, their pagan practices prepared the way for her own existence; thus she can be viewed as benefiting from and *riding* a much larger-than-her pagan beast that provides her own means of locomotion through the course of world history. Moreover, papal Rome, as the final manifestation of biblical history's false [Babylonian] religion feigning to be the true, is the primary

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. our quote of Rev 18:7 and subsequent comments on p. 4.

application of Rev 17's harlot in that it is the harlot in this final "papal Rome" state that receives the ultimate "judgment of the great whore" (v. 1).

Now let's identify the seventh head. Some commentators would like to separate papal Rome from imperial Rome and make papal Rome (after her union with imperial Rome) the seventh head; however, to do this one must ignore the description in v. 10 that the seventh head "must continue a short space." Considering the fact that papal Rome continued for 1260 years in her historical period of supremacy (*i.e.*, A.D. 538–1798), it could hardly be understood that this was a "short space." Of course, "short" is a relative expression; thus, when something is said to be "short," we must ask: Short relative to what? In the case of Rev 17:10 the answer is unmistakable: short relative to the preceding six heads. But 1260 years is over 500 years longer than even the imperial phase of Rome, and imperial Rome continued longer than any of the preceding five empires. Thus, papal Rome in her union with imperial Rome does not fit the description of the seventh head and we summarily dismiss this view as a viable application.

Other commentators understand the papal Rome of the first papal supremacy to be included with imperial Rome in the sixth head and that the "short space" of the seventh head refers to the relatively short duration of papal union with the state following the healing of the deadly wound — that is, the seventh head represents the second and still future papal supremacy. However, v. 10 speaks plainly of seven separate and distinct kings and of the seventh king as an entirely new political power as opposed to a resurrected previous power.

Revelation 13:3 speaks of one of the seven heads there as receiving a deadly wound, but that this "deadly wound" would be "healed." Of course, the head that was wounded and the head that would be healed is one and the same head. Thus, when this head is healed we do not have an *additional* head, we have a *resurrected* head, and a former head reappears on the world scene. Thus, in our view, religio-political Rome as the wounded and then healed head should not be counted twice among the

seven heads of the apocalyptic beast. For this simple reason we do not concur with the view that papal Rome prior to her deadly wound constitutes the sixth head while papal Rome in her healed form constitutes the seventh (or eighth); otherwise, the originally wounded head is not really healed. And this should help us appreciate the fact that, from the standpoint of Bible prophecy, when the deadly wound is indeed healed and papal Rome begins her second period of supremacy, she will not merely be *like* she was in former times, she will in fact *be* what she was in former times.

Considering how the prophecy of Dan 8:9 refers to imperial and papal Rome as one and the same “little horn” political power,<sup>14</sup> to be consistent it is our view that the sixth head of the apocalyptic beast is Rome in *both* her imperial and politicized papal forms and that the papal form includes *both* the first and second periods of papal union with the state. In other words, the sixth head represents *all aspects* of the *political* power of *Rome*. It is also our view that the *woman* of Rev 17 during the latter part of the beast’s sixth head represents the purely *ecclesiastical* aspect of the papacy as the mother apostate Christian *church* while the papal phase of the sixth head of the *beast* represents the purely *political* aspect of the papacy in her adulterous *union* with the *state*. As we know, a *woman* in prophecy represents a *church*<sup>15</sup> and a *beast* represents a *political power*.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, because the papacy involves herself in both ecclesiastical and political functions we should expect prophecy to note the distinction between these functions and to portray the papacy in the symbolism of both woman and beast.

Because we understand the political phase of papal Rome to be the concluding phase of the sixth head, in seeking to identify the seventh head we must now look for a new world political power that both supersedes papal Rome in her historic union with the state and which also continues but a “short space” relative to the preceding six world empires. It now becomes quickly apparent that the French

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<sup>14</sup> As is generally understood by SDA prophecy students.

<sup>15</sup> A pure woman represents a pure church (Isa 54:5–6; Jer 6:2; Ezek 16:1–14; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25–32; Rev 12) and an impure woman represents an impure church (Jer 3:20; Ezek 16:15–59; 23; Rev 17:1–6).

<sup>16</sup> Dan 7:17, 23; 8:20–22.

Empire fits this description perfectly and therefore we identify this empire as the seventh head of Rev 17. Note the following comments on this part of world history:

**Napoleon I** <Napoleon Bonaparte> 1769–1821. Emperor of the French (1804–14). One of the great conquerors of all time and a gifted administrator as well, Napoleon created a short-lived French empire that included virtually all of continental Europe. *MacMillan Concise Dictionary of World History*, 536 (underlined emphasis supplied).

It is commonly accepted that the deadly wound to papal Rome marked the end of the Roman Empire.<sup>17</sup> But there was probably a deadly wound that marked the end of every world empire and the beginning of the next.<sup>18</sup> We would fully expect, then, that when the deadly wound to the sixth head in Rev 17 was inflicted, it was inflicted by the seventh head, and when the time of the sixth head ended, the time of the seventh began. And because the deadly wound to papal Rome in 1798 marked the end of the Roman Empire, and because 1814 marked the end of the French Empire, we now identify the sixteen years of 1798–1814 as the “short space” of the seventh head in Rev 17:10. And here we see, again, how world history perfectly fits the prophetic picture portrayed by Rev 17’s seven heads.

While we have identified the seven heads of the beast of Rev 17, we must still identify the curious eighth head of v. 11 that, for some reason, was not included in the original portrayal of the beast in vs. 3–6. But since v. 11 identifies this head with the beast itself, by identifying one we will identify the other. Therefore, because we are given more information about the beast than about the eighth head, we will approach the problem of identifying the eighth head by simply identifying the beast. Once we have accomplished this, and since we know the sixth head is destined to be healed and that it will therefore reappear at some point in history, we will then attempt to establish the chronological sequence of all eight heads.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *GC* 439.

<sup>18</sup> While the transition point between the Egyptian and Assyrian empires is not so easy to identify, the transition between the Assyrian and Babylonian empires came, in our view, at the Battle of Harran in 609 B.C. The transition between the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires came at Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. (cf. Dan 5); the transition between the Medo-Persian and Greek empires came at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 B.C.; and the transition between the Greek and Roman empires came at the Battle of Pydna in 168 B.C.

### The Beast (v. 8)

The most significant clues we have regarding the identity of the beast are in v. 8:

**8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is [to come].**

Like v. 10 regarding the seven kings, v. 8 describes a past-present-future sequence regarding the beast. Here again we have absolutely no basis for moving the point of reference to any other time from that of when this prophecy was given to John. To advance the point of reference to either the time of the deadly wound in 1798, or to the time the deadly wound was supposedly healed in 1929,<sup>19</sup> or to the time of the millennium is to impose an idea into this verse that is in no way evidenced by the verse itself. This verse plainly states that the beast existed *prior* to John's time, that it did not exist *in* John's time, and that it would exist again *future* to John's time.

That it is appropriate to supply the words "to come" at the end of v. 8 is evident from the fact that the last part of this verse "that was, and is not, and yet is" parallels the first part "was, and is not, and shall ascend." It is also obvious that the beast cannot both exist and not exist at the same time. But this impossibility is the reason some commentators justify projecting the point of time reference for the beast forward to some future point. That is, if we place the time reference point for the heads in the time of John (thus placing the sixth head concurrent with John), it seems impossible to apply this same time reference point to the *beast* given the fact that the beast is said to be currently in its "is not" phase. That is, how can the sixth head of the beast exist at the same time the beast itself is said to not exist? This is like attempting to have the beast exist and not exist at the same time. But we believe we can reconcile this apparent quandary without resorting to inconsistent exegesis.

Key to resolving this problem is noting that the beast is in the "bottomless pit" when in its "is not" period. Thus, the beast *does* exist when in its "is not" phase; it's just in the bottomless pit. But

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<sup>19</sup> When the papacy was made an autonomous civil state by her Lateran Treaty with Italy.



though the *beast* is confined to the bottomless pit during this time, the prophecy does not speak of the *heads* being simultaneously so confined. Actually, we believe that correctly understanding the relationship between the beast and its heads allows the heads to be manifested in world history at the same time the beast itself is out of world history and confined to the bottomless pit, and we will explain this relationship shortly. Nevertheless, it is specifically the prophetic reference to the bottomless pit that leads some commentators to move the time reference point for the beast ahead to the millennium. Granted, to do this is tempting given the reference to the bottomless pit in Rev 20:1–3:

**AND I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.**

**2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,**

**3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.**

Here we have “the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan” which an angel “cast . . . into the bottomless pit” for “a thousand years,” after which it is understood that he ascends out of the pit in that he is “loosed a little season.” Understanding this “dragon” to be one and the same “dragon” as that of Rev 12:3 (according to v. 9) which has seven heads and ten horns, it *appears* logical to identify the beast of Rev 17:8 which also has seven heads and ten horns and which also spends time in the bottomless pit and then ascends out of it to also be Satan and that the bottomless pit of 17:8 is the same bottomless pit of 20:1–3. But though we concur that the identities of the dragons of Rev 12 and 20 are one and the same, and though we concur that the identities of the seven heads and ten horns of the dragon and the beast of Rev 12 and 17 are also one and the same, it does not necessarily follow that the identities of the bottomless pits of Rev 17 and 20 are also one and the same. This is because there is yet another reference in the Apocalypse to a bottomless pit out of which a beast ascends. Revelation 11:7–8:

**7 And when they (the “two witnesses” of v. 3: the Bible Old and New Testaments)<sup>20</sup> shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.**

**8 And their dead bodies *shall lie* in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.**

The Spirit of Prophecy identifies “the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit” of v. 7 as being historically fulfilled by France during the French Revolution, during which “the law of God was openly set aside by the National Council” and “France publicly rejected God and set aside the Bible” (*GC* 286). The government of France was then openly hostile toward *all* Christians regardless of whether they were true or false and, consequently, it was during this relatively brief period when the deadly wound to papal Rome was inflicted. But the place of the beast’s attack on God’s two witnesses is described as “the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt.” And *Egypt* happens to be the first head in our sequence of Rev 17’s heads.

In our view, the beast of Rev 11:7 is Satan as he manifests himself in a world political power that reflects his true character of open defiance of God. Though Egypt had historically been a polytheistic pagan society and nation, Satan’s real character rose to the surface when Pharaoh openly defied God by saying, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go” (Ex 5:2). In the context of the great controversy, these words could just as well have been spoken by Satan himself in his defiance of God and his stubborn refusal to relinquish his hold on God’s people. That is, at this point in Egypt’s history, just as Moses typified Christ, Pharaoh typified Satan.

According to the Spirit of Prophecy, the principal characteristics of the beast of Rev 11:7 are atheism and licentiousness.<sup>21</sup> These characteristics distinguish the atheistic political powers (Pharaoh’s Egypt and revolutionary France), manifesting Satan’s true character and open hostility toward God, from those paganistic political powers (Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *GC* 267.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *GC* 269.

Rome) in which Satan's true nature is not openly manifested but which is instead characterized in prophecy as being hidden in the bottomless pit.

Obviously, understanding Rev 11:7 as we do, the *past* bottomless pit of this verse is in no way identical to the *future* bottomless pit of Rev 20. And understanding the seven heads of the beast of Rev 17 as we do and that the time reference point of v. 8 is the time of John, we now identify the bottomless pit of Rev 17:8 as being the same as that of 11:7 as opposed to that of 20:3. That is:

**8 The beast that thou sawest was** [in the form of atheistic and licentious Egypt],<sup>22</sup> **and is not** [in the time of John]; **and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit** [of Rev 11:7 in the form of atheistic and licentious France], **and go into perdition . . . .**

Therefore, we understand that the beast of Rev 17 represents Satan's true character as it is manifested in the world by those political powers (or those *heads* on the beast) that defiantly deny the existence of God. Though Satan is the "prince"<sup>23</sup> of the characteristically pagan world political powers as well (and therefore they also count as heads on the prophetic beast), these powers do not openly reveal the true nature of the beast and, therefore, they do not truly represent the beast itself. We can understand that Egypt and France have fulfilled the *dual* role of manifesting the beast itself as well as being heads on the beast, while Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome have fulfilled the *single* role of being heads only, during which time of the reigns of their respective empires the beast itself is lurking just below the surface of political history in the bottomless pit. And here we see the relationship between the beast and its heads, and we see how the heads can be manifested in history at times the beast is not.

We will note again that both Egypt and France possessed the spirit of atheism only very temporarily; they were much more commonly characterized by paganism, or, in the case of medieval France, what can be termed "baptized paganism" — *i.e.*, Catholicism. But these powers are only

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<sup>22</sup> That Pharaoh's Egypt, like Sodom, was licentious is evident in that Israel "rose up to play" (Ex 32:6) during the golden-calf episode, no doubt emulating Egypt's licentious religious festivities.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Dan 10:13, 20.

portrayed in Bible prophecy as “the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit” for their very brief periods of departure into the arena of formally and officially claiming unbelief and openly and defiantly scorning any and all of God’s claims over them. This blatant manifestation of the character of Satan during these periods, then, qualified these nations as the prophetic beast of Rev 17.

### The Eighth Head (v. 11)

The only verse that mentions the eighth head is v. 11:

**11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.**

Here we are introduced to yet an eighth head which is also the beast itself; and here we are told that the beast is also “of the seven [*heads*].” We can now understand how the beast can be “of the seven [*heads*]” in that we have just determined that the beast has manifested itself in its first and seventh heads of Egypt and France respectively. But now he is reappearing again as an eighth head. Since we have identified the seventh head as Napoleon’s short-lived French Empire, and since there has not arisen a subsequent world empire, reference to an eighth head here is an obvious reference to a yet future manifestation of the beast as an openly and militantly defiant [to God’s authority] atheistic world political power. And it is right here in our study of Rev 17 that we must proceed with much greater caution, for we no longer have historical markers to affirm or refute our interpretation.

As we have seen, the deadly wound occurred to the sixth head of papal Rome in 1798 when the beast of Rev 17 ascended out of the bottomless pit in the form of its seventh head of atheistic France. But the seventh head as the principal Old-World political power could only continue a “short space” as it had to be out of the way by the end of the 2300 days in 1844 to allow for the possibility of the rapid fulfillment of the healing of the sixth head’s deadly wound and all subsequent end-time prophetic events. Since we understand the deadly wound of the sixth head to one day be healed, and because the heads can only exist in history one at a time, and now establishing the chronological sequence of all eight heads, we understand the chronological order of the heads to be sequential

through to the end of the seventh head, the seventh head is then followed (after an indeterminate delay) for a brief time by the *resurrected* sixth head, and the resurrected sixth head is finally followed for a *very* brief time by the eighth head.

1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Assyria</u>	<u>Babylon</u>	<u>Persia</u>	<u>Greece</u>	<u>Rome</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>Rome</u>	<u>atheistic power</u>
1570–933	933–609	609–539	539–331	331–168	168 BC–AD 1798	1798–1814	future	future
beast/head	head	head	head	head	head	beast/head	head	beast/head

The question naturally presents itself: If the beast of Rev 17 has eight heads, why is it described as having only seven heads in vs. 3, 7, 9, and 10? First, while the seven heads represent the seven major consecutive Old-World political powers that have spanned the past 3600 years of world history, the eighth head is unique in that it exists for only a very brief period of time. Even the seventh-head power of Napoleonic France that dominated Europe for sixteen years is described as continuing just a “short space” (v. 10). But given its nearness to the end, it appears that the power of the eighth head will exist for what could be just a matter of days; consequently, the eighth head is not included in the overall view of Old-World political history which the apocalyptic beast with its seven heads portrays.

A second reason why there is an eighth head on a seven-headed beast is seen in the interruption in the sequence between the seventh and eighth heads; that is, the sequence is interrupted by the unusual return on to the world scene of a previous head — the sixth. This break in the sequence of heads sets the eighth head apart from the seven. We also note that the return of the sixth head does not immediately follow the seventh; there is an unspecified period of time between the seventh head and the resurrected sixth. This is in distinct contrast with the transition points between all the other heads (including, we should expect, between the resurrected sixth head and the eighth).<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the deadly wound inflicted on the seventh head was also unique in that it was not inflicted by the eighth head. Napoleon’s empire came to an end by an allied coalition of states, not by

<sup>24</sup> Cf. again fn. 18 on p. 15.

a single and succeeding dominate world empire.<sup>25</sup> In our view, then, these reasons explain why the seven-headed beast of Rev 17 has, as an appendage to the prophetic overview of world history, an added eighth head.

Our identification of the beast of Rev 17 has led us to identify the eighth head in general terms as a future atheistic world political power. To identify this head in specific terms, however, we must first identify the ten horns.

### The Ten Horns and the Eighth Head Identified (vs. 12–14)

The most significant clues we have regarding the identity of the ten horns are in vs. 12–13:

**12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.**  
**13 These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.**

From these verses we can note several things: the ten kings are still future to John's day; they are contemporaries with each other; they are contemporaries with the beast; they "receive power as kings one hour with the beast"; and though they have separate identities, they are united in their political objectives in that they "have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast."

Understanding the beast of Rev 17 as we do, the beast is out of the bottomless pit and presents itself visibly on only three occasions in world history — these are as the first (Egypt), seventh (France), and eighth (future) heads of the beast. Because we are told that the ten kings are future to John's day and that they reign with the beast, it is evident that they reign with the beast during its manifestation as either its seventh or eighth heads.

It is generally agreed that the seven heads and ten horns of the dragon of Rev 12 and the seven heads and ten horns of the two beasts of Rev 13 and 17 all employ the same representations. But while there is disagreement in Adventism as to the specific identities of the seven heads, there is

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<sup>25</sup> The coalition against Napoleon consisted of eight principal states: Austria, Russia, Prussia, Sweden, United Kingdom, German (Rhine Confederation), Spain, and Portugal. Napoleon abdicated by signing the Treaty of Fontainebleau in April 1814.

general agreement that the identities of the ten horns are those of the ten historical kingdoms of the divided Roman Empire; that is, they represent the same political powers as do the ten horns of the fourth beast of Dan 7. But while this understanding presents no problem in Rev 12 and 13, it does present a problem when we get to Rev 17. Specifically, how can the ten historical kingdoms of the divided Roman Empire be considered as having received power as kings for “one hour” with the beast of Rev 17? And how can they be considered as having “one mind” and as giving their power and strength to the beast? The *SDA Bible Commentary* notes this difficulty in its comments on Rev 17:12:

Some take these ten horns to represent the same ten powers specified in Daniel and earlier in the Revelation. Others, on the basis that these ten “receive power as kings one hour with the beast,” consider that they cannot, therefore, be identified with the various nations that arose during the breakup of the Roman Empire. *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:856.

In trying to resolve this problem some have suggested that the number ten in Rev 17:12 is symbolic and thus does not specify exactly ten kings in number. However, to do this and still maintain consistency one would also have to view the ten horns of Dan 7 the same way. But Dan 7 specifies that three of its ten horns are “plucked up by the roots” (v. 8), and it certainly appears that history has revealed the identity of not only the ten kingdoms but also the three uprooted by the papal little horn.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, it is generally accepted that the seven heads of Rev 17 represent seven literal kings/kingdoms in one form or another. Revelation 17 plainly states that the seven heads “are seven kings” (v. 10), but it states just as plainly that the ten horns “are ten kings” (v. 12). Thus, if consistency means anything in prophetic interpretation, if we recognize that the ten horns of Dan 7 are ten in *literal* number and that the seven heads of Rev 17 are seven in *literal* number, we can

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<sup>26</sup> Actually, the identity of the three uprooted horns is still not settled in Adventism. While two horns have not been a problem (Vandals uprooted in A.D. 534 and Ostrogoths in 538 or 553, both uprooted by the Roman Byzantine Empire), the third is controverted. The two main contenders for the third uprooted horn are the Heruli (defeated in 493 by the Ostrogoths who were ostensibly acting on behalf of the Byzantine Romans) and the Visigoths (supposedly uprooted in 508 by the Franks). In our view, the third uprooted horn was the Burgundians who were uprooted in 534 by the Franks. For an overview of the historic SDA view of the three uprooted horns, see 4BC 826–827; for our view, see Appendix A.

readily dismiss the idea that the ten horns of Rev 17 are *symbolic* in number, and we can conclude that to suggest that they *are* symbolic is but a simplistic attempt at resolving the problem of Rev 17's ten horns.

Having said this, our difficulty becomes even greater when we understand that the beast during the time period of the historical ten kingdoms of the divided Roman Empire could only be the seventh head of France and that by the time Napoleonic France rose to power three of these historical kingdoms had already been uprooted and only seven remained. Furthermore, while we can logically identify Napoleonic France as both a manifestation of the beast as well as one of its seven heads (in that v. 11 plainly tells us that the beast “is of the seven”), we can *not* logically identify Napoleonic France as both a manifestation of the beast as well as one of its ten horns else we would have France, according to v. 13, giving its power and strength unto itself.

We suggest the solution to these problems can be found in understanding that the ten horns of Rev 17 in fact do *not* represent the same ten powers as do the ten horns of Dan 7. While the ten horns of Dan 7 represent the ten principal historical political divisions of the divided Roman Empire, in our view the ten horns of Rev 17 represent the remnants of the divided Roman Empire that constitute ten political powers of present-day Europe. We will note that understanding the ten horns of Rev 17 in this way not only puts them in the same time period as that of the resurrected *sixth* head of the beast but also in that of the future *eighth* head manifesting the beast itself. Thus, it appears that the *beast* the ten horns receive power as kings *with* and whom they give their power and strength *to* in Rev 17:12–13 can be none other than the beast as it manifests itself through its future eighth head.

Though the ten kings of Rev 17 have separate identities, it seems reasonable to understand that they are united in their political objectives in that they “have one mind.” And knowing that these ten kings both “give their power and strength unto the beast” and “receive power as kings one hour with the beast,” it now seems apparent that these ten European nations will one day form a political union



for their common benefit. And it now follows that the political beast power which these ten kings collectively give their power and strength to is in fact *the organization of their own union*. This harmonizes with the wording of Rev 17:12 that tells us the ten kings “have received no kingdom as yet.” By employing the word “kingdom” in its singular form here,<sup>27</sup> this implies that one day the ten kings (plural) will receive *a* “kingdom” (singular). And how do no less than ten kings come to reign over one kingdom? By joining their sovereign territories under the umbrella of a single political alliance.

All recognize that a truly united confederacy of European nations would constitute a major player on the world scene politically, economically, and militarily. And as the world’s political powers marshal for the final conflict we can be sure there will be ever greater efforts to bring about a united Europe. We also expect that as this unity continues to develop, Christians [for the most part] will see in it nothing that poses an obvious threat. However, we should also expect that as the character of late 18<sup>th</sup> century France changed suddenly for the worse, so we can expect the character of this eschatological European power to one day change suddenly to that of the beast ascending once again out of the bottomless pit. But it will only be when this political power formally and officially denies the existence of God that we will be able to identify it as Rev 17’s beast ascended out of the bottomless pit [for the third time in prophetic history] and as the eighth head of Rev 17:11.

It should be pointed out that Rev 17:12–13 only specifies the ten horns that “receive power as kings one hour with the beast” and “give their power and strength unto the beast.” That is, it will not be until the *beast* manifests itself again that we will be able to identify the specific ten nations of Europe that constitute the beast’s ten horns. This means that *prior* to the time this European power formally denies the existence of God, particularly when it initially forms itself and even during the subsequent time when papal Rome reigns again in league with it (the union of which will constitute

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<sup>27</sup> Also v. 17.

the resurrected sixth head), there does not necessarily have to be precisely ten nations who are members of this political alliance. Also, because the ten horns will not be identifiable until the beast manifests itself in the form of its eighth head, when they *are* identifiable they will necessarily be self-declared atheistic powers openly hostile to God. This fits the conflict depicted in v. 14:

**14 These [ten horns] shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen and faithful.**

Understanding that the beast openly manifests itself in world history as its wholly atheistic first (Egypt), seventh (revolutionary France), and eighth (future) heads explains why the elements of good news in v. 14 are placed right here in this otherwise sinister-filled explanation of John's mysterious vision. The atheistic powers of world history make *open* "war with the Lamb" and defiantly deny the Lamb's very existence. And when the ten horns reign "as kings ... with the beast" (v. 12) and "give their power and strength unto the beast" (v. 13), they too become overtly atheistic, and their atheism provides their rationale for denying God's authority over them. They effectively echo the defiance of Pharaoh: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Ex 5:2). But then comes the rejoinder of good news in v. 14: "the Lamb shall overcome them." But there's more. Implied in v. 14 is the fact that the "called, and chosen and faithful" also overcome them, and we can be sure they do this in the same way the brethren overcame their accuser in Rev 12:11:

**11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.**

If our understanding of the beast and its ten horns is fundamentally correct, we might suspect that the European Union (EU) forms the basis for this beast.<sup>28</sup> But there are currently 27 European nations who are members of the EU.<sup>29</sup> How, then, could this union of 27 nations be reduced to ten,

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<sup>28</sup> The EU was officially established with twelve member states when the Maastricht Treaty went into effect in 1993. However, various forms of European integration preceded this, beginning with the Treaty of Paris in 1952.

<sup>29</sup> Beginning with the original six countries in the Treaty of Paris in 1952, three joined the alliance in 1973, one in 1981 and two in 1986. These twelve then formed the EU with the Maastricht Treaty in 1993; three more joined in 1995, ten in 2004, two in 2007, one in 2013, then the UK withdrew in 2020 (termed Brexit).

each of which constitutes one of Rev 17's ten horns? Conjecturing, a possible scenario is that if the EU is not reduced to ten member nations because of the economic and political instability we expect will arise just before and, especially, during the second papal supremacy,<sup>30</sup> there will be secessions from an organization determined to defy the living God by formally denying His existence. This scenario suggests that any repeat of the extreme political and religious upheaval of the French Revolution will, at the very end of time, be just as extreme — even too extreme for many of the European nations to accent to.

But there is another scenario. The European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is a joint military project that was proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017. Nine states signed a Letter of Intent in June 2018 and there are currently thirteen member states in this new European alliance.<sup>31</sup> EI2 is structured entirely outside that of the EU itself, not to mention outside of NATO. Interestingly, this alliance was highlighted on France's Bastille Day in 2019 when the flags of the then ten-member nations led 4000 troops from these nations in the annual Bastille Day Military Parade in Paris.<sup>32</sup> While the organizers claim EI2 is not intended to become a separate military force from NATO, it could very easily become one. Of course, time will tell where this will lead, but the rapid formation of EI2 shows just how fluid and unpredictable the organizational structure of Europe is. And it shows how our proposed fulfillment of Rev 17's ten horns could occur even without the direct involvement of the EU.

It could be maintained that a last-day confederation of European nations would contradict the

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<sup>30</sup> This instability has already been evidenced by Brexit.

<sup>31</sup> The nine charter members were France, Germany, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and Estonia. Finland joined in November 2018, making precisely ten members. Italy, Norway, and Sweden subsequently joined in 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Bastille Day is France's annual celebration of the beginning of the French Revolution, which came on July 14, 1789, with Bastille Day 2019 celebrating the Revolution's 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary. That the spirit of the Revolution is still very much alive in France was also evidenced in the recent Paris Summer Olympics opening ceremony in July 2024. The ceremony celebrated the French Revolution, its debauchery and dechristianization, by celebrating Marie Antoinette's beheading and by the mockery of Christianity.

prophecy of Dan 2:43 which states that the ten iron and clay toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image "shall not cleave one to another." However, though the organizations of the EU and EI2 involve a unification of sorts, both organizations still recognize the political autonomy of each member state. Certainly, the nations of western Europe have long been organized economically in the form of the Common Market and Eurosystem, and militarily (with the US and Canada) in the form of NATO.<sup>33</sup> The formation of the EU in 1993 and the EI2 in 2018 are merely further consolidations of European states from what has existed for many years. Furthermore, if Napoleon's French Empire did not contradict Dan 2:43, what we suggest in fulfillment of Rev 17 will not.

With the re-emergence of the papacy on the world political scene in her re-union with the state when the deadly wound is healed and which will constitute the resurrection of the Roman Empire, we should now expect the ten iron and clay toes of Dan 2 [that make up the ten divisions of the Roman Empire] to re-emerge with her. This now provides a full set of ten toes on Nebuchadnezzar's image at the time God sets up His kingdom as opposed to only a partial set of seven toes if we only apply the historical divisions of the Roman Empire to this prophetic image. Thus, it is our view that the ten divisions of the Roman Empire have manifested themselves historically as the ten horns of Dan 7 and they will manifest themselves again in the last days as the ten horns of Rev 17.

Finally regarding the ten horns, though horns are normally thought of as outgrowths of a head, in our view the ten horns of Rev 17 are outgrowths of the beast itself, not of any one or all of its heads.

#### The Waters, the Horns, and the Woman Postscript (vs. 15–18)

Revelation 17's final verses provide additional information. Revelation 17:15:

**15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.**

The description of the "waters" here is evidence that the history depicted by the woman and seven-headed beast is, like that of the first beast of Rev 13 that rises "out of the sea" (v. 1) and the

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<sup>33</sup> NATO was formed in 1949.

four beasts of Dan 7 that came up “from the sea” (v. 3), confined to the highly populated area of the Old World.<sup>34</sup> That is, the woman and beast do *not* depict the history of the New World. This observation rules out the view that one of Rev 17’s seven heads represents the United States which, as the second beast of Rev 13, is a power that rises “out of the earth” (v. 11). Certainly, the United States is a major player in earth’s final events, but it is an entirely separate player from the Old-World powers. The seven heads on the seven-headed beast can only exist one at a time. This is why there is always a deadly encounter when any two heads seek to rule at the same time. The United States, however, because of its geographical separation from the Old World, can and does co-exist with its contemporaneous Old-World empires. It reigned concurrently with the sixth head for about two decades, with all of the short-lived seventh head, and it will reign concurrently with *and as a friend of* the resurrected sixth head, and we expect it to reign concurrently with *but as an adversary of* the eighth head. We say, “adversary of” the eighth head because we believe the United States will strongly oppose the direction the ten horns take when they “give their power and strength unto the beast” (v. 13) and formally declare their corporate alliance an atheistic one that denies God’s existence. And the United States will be especially opposed to the ten horns when they physically attack the papacy according to Rev 17:16–17:

**16 And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.**

**17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.**

The ten horns not only “make war with the Lamb” (v. 14) but they hate the great pretender of the bride of Christ — *i.e.* they hate the “whore” that they, prior to declaring themselves atheistic, had been married to [because they thought she could gain them God’s favor]. This idea might seem surprising until it is realized that in vs. 16–17 God intervenes in world political history and puts in the hearts of the ten kings “to fulfil his will.” And God’s will, in this case and at this time, is actually the

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. GC 439–441.

main focus of Rev 17 — “the judgment of the great whore” (v. 1). And because this judgment, along with the time the ten horns “receive power as kings one hour with the beast” (v. 12), is still in our future, it is evident that these verses describe a *second* deadly wound to the papacy that, consequently, marks the end of a *second* papal supremacy. This will essentially be a repeat of the first deadly wound that was the providential product of the French Revolution,<sup>35</sup> and thus we expect the second deadly wound to come in conjunction with its own Reign of Terror. While not making a prophetic application to Rev 17, Ellen White makes a statement that is consistent with this prospect:

Anarchy is seeking to sweep away all law, not only divine, but human. The centralizing of wealth and power; the vast combinations for the enriching of the few at the expense of the many; the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interests and claims; the spirit of unrest, of riot and bloodshed; the world-wide dissemination of the same teachings that led to the French Revolution — all are tending to involve *the whole world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France*. *Education*, 228 (emphasis supplied).

France was shaken by her Revolution. The whole world is next. The papal wound will be healed, and the eschatological harlot will say in her heart, “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Rev 18:7). Then suddenly, “in one hour is she made desolate” (Rev 18:19). And, as we have seen, she is made desolate by the ten horns, the organizational union of which, in our view, constitutes the eighth head of Rev 17’s beast. But after God employs the beast to execute judgment on the whore, then it will be time for the beast itself to “go into perdition” (v. 11). This is described in Rev 19:20 where both the beast and the false prophet [of the United States] are “cast alive into a lake of fire.” “Cast alive” meaning that these two powers (the eighth head of the beast of Rev 17 and the second beast of Rev 13), following the demise of papal Rome in chapters 17 and 18, continue to co-exist right up to the Second Coming. But in the midst of all the doom and gloom of Revelation’s judgment chapters, God provides a ray of hope, such as in Rev 17:14: those who are “called, and chosen and faithful” have nothing to fear. While the world has much to fear, God’s people need fear

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<sup>35</sup> Fulfilling the principle expressed in Rev 13:10: “He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.”

nothing, for they are with the Lamb, and He is “Lord of lords, and King of kings” (v. 14) and He wins the war. Now the final verse of Rev 17:

**18 And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.**

This is the final descriptive verse of Rev 17’s principal subject — the woman. She is not only a harlot woman but also “that great city.” Of course, that city is Babylon — the city whose history goes back to Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, then still further back to Nimrod’s Babel. In the time of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon reigned over Judah and “all these nations round about” (Jer 25:9) until her 70 years of probation closed and her king, drunk with the wine of Babylon, was “weighed in the balances, and found wanting” (Dan 5:27). Thus, we can parallel “the judgment of the great whore” in Rev 17 to the judgment of ancient Babylon in Dan 5. This is the judgment on “that great city” that, throughout all of biblical history, has presumed to war against God and His people.

Of course, we know the “called, and chosen and faithful” constitute another woman and comprise another city — the “woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1) and “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22). And we believe they will constitute the firstfruits of what at the end of the millennium is described as “the holy city, new Jerusalem ... prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2).

### Summary

We have identified the principal character of Rev 17 — the harlot woman — as, in her specific eschatological form, the papacy; however, this is just her final historical form. She existed in previous forms dating back to ancient Babylon and even to the more ancient Babel. Because of her long history of projecting herself as being true to God while in reality prostituting herself and being unfaithful to God, Rev 17 gives her special attention in that its stated purpose is to show John “the judgment of the great whore” (v. 1). And this special attention is of such extent that it is carried over into all of chapter 18, then heaven even celebrates the execution of this judgment in the first part of

chapter 19.

Key to understanding the historical elements of Rev 17 is recognizing the time reference point of the vision's explanation to be the time of John. Interpreting the heads as Old-World political empires, this reference point establishes the sixth head as the Roman Empire, and it establishes the first five heads as representing the empires preceding Rome, of which there were precisely five: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. It then follows that the seventh head represents the empire following Rome, and this empire is naturally the one that brought the Roman Empire to its end in 1798 — *i.e.*, Napoleon's French Empire. And since the prophecy plainly tells us the seventh head would continue but a "short space" (v. 10), and since Napoleon's empire continued but a short time relative to those preceding it, our sequence of the seven heads fits history very nicely.

Our next significant element in Rev 17's interpretation was identifying the pure form of "the beast" as being Satan warring against God overtly through avowed atheistic world powers, manifested in history as the beast's first, seventh, and eighth heads. None of the other heads denied the existence of God; they just worshiped false gods, and thus they covertly warred against God as paganistic world powers. And during the periods of the pagan heads, the beast itself lurks just below the surface of world history in what prophecy terms "the bottomless pit."

We identified the ten horns as ten European nations that in the future form a coalition to once again overtly war against God, now in the form of the beast's eighth head. But God employs these "kings" to execute a final judgment on the harlot, just as He had employed revolutionary France to execute judgment on her at the end of her medieval period of papal supremacy. In the case of the final judgment, however, there will be no coming back for papal Rome.

Revelation 17 demonstrates that, despite all the principalities and powers Satan employs in his cosmic war against God, God is in complete control. He foresees all, and foretells all that is necessary for us to know. It now remains for us to heed His call and be faithful to the end.



## Appendix A: The Three Uprooted Horns of Daniel 7

The historic Adventist view of Dan 7's three uprooted horns is noted in the *SDA Bible Commentary*:

The "little horn" is a symbol of papal Rome. Hence the plucking up of three horns symbolizes the overthrow of three of the barbarian nations. Among the principal obstructions to the rise of papal Rome to political power were the *Heruli*, the *Vandals*, and the *Ostrogoths*. All three were supporters of Arianism, which was the most formidable rival of Catholicism. 4BC 826 (emphasis supplied).

In more recent years some Adventist theologians have modified this view, as Heinz Schaidinger summarized:

In summary, the three horns mentioned in Daniel 7, which were uprooted to enable the little horn power to grow and become great, were well nigh annihilated and made powerless in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. These were the *Visigoths*, defeated by the Franks, who were allied with the Byzantines in 507 and 508; the *Vandals*, who were crushed by the Byzantines in 534, and the *Ostrogoths*, who were overcome by the Byzantines from 536 to 553 or 561. *Historical Confirmation of Prophetic Periods*, 29–30.<sup>36</sup>

Schaidinger explains the change:

I do not favour the Heruli as one of the three uprooted powers for the following reasons: (1) It was not the tribe of the Heruli that was destroyed by Theoderic's murder of Odoacer. Odoacer was partly of Herulian descent, true; yet, his soldiers were mercenaries coming from many tribes. There was no such thing as a "Herulian kingdom". (2) The fight between Theoderic and Odoacer had nothing to do with the Roman pontiff. The papacy did not gain anything out of the change of rulership from Odoacer to Theoderic. *Ibid.*, 30.

While we concur that the Heruli were not one of the three uprooted horns, substituting the Visigoths for the Heruli has its own problems. Though the Visigoths suffered a significant military defeat by the Franks in 507, they were in no way uprooted; they continued to possess the greater part of the Iberian Peninsula and to exist as a nation for another 200 years. This being the case, rather than the Visigoths, we suggest it was the Burgundian kingdom that should be counted among the three uprooted horns. To support this we will cite several online historical sources:

The decline of the [*Burgundian*] kingdom began when they came under attack from their former Frankish allies. In 523, the sons of King Clovis campaigned in the Burgundian lands, instigated by their mother Clotilde, in revenge for Gundobad's death of her father. In 532, the Burgundians were decisively defeated by the Franks at Battle of Autun, whereafter King Godomar was killed and *Burgundy incorporated into the Frankish kingdom in 534.* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom\\_of\\_the\\_Burgundians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_the_Burgundians) (8/5/14; emphasis supplied).

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<sup>36</sup> Pamphlet of the SDA Biblical Research Institute: <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/shop/historical-confirmation-prophetic-periods>.

Subjugated by the Huns in 437, they [*the Burgundians*] accepted Roman federate status and essentially moved into the vacuum of dwindling Roman power, being ceded Roman lands in 443 and 458. Towards the end of the fifth century, King Gundobad was briefly a player in the last stages of Western Roman politics, holding power as the commander of the army from 472 to 473. *By 534, however, Frankish power could no longer be resisted, and Burgundy became another piece in the Frankish kingdom.* <http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsEurope/FranceBurgundy.htm> (8/5/14; emphasis supplied).

The Burgundians were extending their power over southeastern Gaul; that is, northern Italy, western Switzerland, and southeastern France. In 493 Clovis, king of the Franks, married the Burgundian princess Clotilda, daughter of Chilperic. *At first allies with Clovis' Franks against the Visigoths in the early 6th century, the Burgundians were eventually conquered by the Franks in 534 CE.* The Burgundian kingdom was made part of the Merovingian kingdoms, and the Burgundians themselves were by and large absorbed as well. [http://horus-7.angelfire.com/burgundians\\_history.html](http://horus-7.angelfire.com/burgundians_history.html) (10/11/2014; emphasis supplied).

Like the Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Visigoths, the Burgundians were Arian Christians. And like the Byzantine Romans, the Franks in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to Clovis' conversion from paganism to Catholicism, were Catholic. And particularly given the fact that in 508 the Roman emperor Anastasius officially embraced the Frank kingdom as an ally in the ongoing conflicts with the various Arian kingdoms, it can be seen that papal Rome could now employ the Franks to overthrow the Arian nations just as much as she could the Romans.

It should be noted that, contrary to Schaidinger's comments in his first quote above, the Franks were *not* allied with the Byzantines when they defeated the Visigoths in 507. This alliance was not formed until 508. It should also be noted that, as indicated in the quote above, the Franks *were* allied with the Burgundians when they defeated the Visigoths. This is a clear indicator that the battle of Vouille between the Franks and the Visigoths in 507 was not religiously motivated, as one Arian kingdom would not ally itself with a Catholic [or pagan] kingdom against another Arian kingdom if the conflict was religiously motivated. And this basic logic accords with our previous assessment that the Visigoths were not one of the three uprooted horns.

It is true that history speaks of Burgundians long after the 6<sup>th</sup> century. However, these "Burgundians" are identified as such simply because of their connection with the geographical area of France called Burgundy, not because they are ancestral descendants of the original Burgundians.

The name of the Burgundians has since remained connected to the area of modern France that still bears their name . . . . Between the 6th and 20th centuries, however, the boundaries and political connections of this area have changed frequently; *none of those changes have had anything to do with the original Burgundians*. The name *Burgundians* used here and generally used by English writers to refer to the Burgundes is a later formation and more precisely refers to the inhabitants of the territory of Burgundy which was named from the people called Burgundes. The descendants of the Burgundians today are found primarily among the French-speaking Swiss and neighbouring regions of France. *Ibid.* (emphasis supplied).

The reason “The descendants of the Burgundians today are found primarily among the French-speaking Swiss and neighbouring regions of France” is because: “The Burgundian language . . . appears to have become extinct during the late sixth century.”<sup>37</sup> And the reason the Burgundian language became extinct in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century is because: “In 532 the Burgundians were decisively defeated by the Franks at Autun . . . and Burgundian lands was annexed by the Frankish Empire in 534.”<sup>38</sup> Beginning in 534, then, the Burgundians assimilated into Frankish culture and language and their own language was effectively lost a generation later. The same Wikipedia article goes on to say that from 534 onward “there no longer was an independent Burgundian kingdom.”

Adventist prophecy students have historically related the Burgundian kingdom with today’s Switzerland. But Switzerland today is a conglomerate of language groups: some 63% speak German (indicating ethnic connection with the Alemanni), 23% speak French (connecting with the Franks), 8% speak Italian (connecting with the Lombards),<sup>39</sup> and the remaining 6% are miscellaneous.<sup>40</sup> We see, then, that today’s Switzerland is a composite of several ancient nations, none of which is purely Burgundian, and therefore it is incorrect to identify Switzerland with the ancient Burgundian kingdom.

We believe the people historians have called Burgundians after the 6<sup>th</sup> century should not be identified with the ancient Burgundian kingdom. This being the case, and though this is admittedly a very cursory consideration of the subject, we propose that Daniel 7’s three uprooted horns represent

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<sup>37</sup> Wikipedia article “Burgundians” (accessed 5/20/2019).

<sup>38</sup> Wikipedia article “Kingdom of Burgundy” (accessed 5/20/2019).

<sup>39</sup> The Lombards lost their own language when they transitioned to Latin beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. the Wikipedia articles “Lombard language” (re: the Lombard language spoken today by some 3½ million people in southern Switzerland but mostly in the Lombardy region of northern Italy) and “Lombardic language” (re: the extinct Lombard language).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Wikipedia article “Switzerland” (accessed 5/20/2019).

the Vandals (uprooted in 534 by the Romans), the Burgundians (uprooted in 534 by the Franks), and the Ostrogoths (uprooted in 553 by the Romans), with both the Romans and Franks acting in mutual interest with the papacy.