

The Counterfeiting Parousia of the 8th King in Revelation 17

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ABSTRACT

The complex symbolic presentation of the beast in Revelation 17 details a specific sequence of hostile historical powers and proxies through which Satan has acted in his attempts to war against Christ and his people. But Revelation 17 shows a significant development beyond these historical proxies in the final one. While acting through 7 historical proxies, in the final 8th manifestation of the beast, Satan himself acts in proxy form. The final proxy form is a daring mimicking of the Coming of 'Christ.' That is, in the beast's final manifestation, Satan counterfeits the Second Coming of Christ. This study will engage in a close reading of the text using visual-textual exegesis.

Introduction¹

The vision of Revelation 17 comes at the end of the book of Revelation just before Christ's Second Coming is pictured (Rev 19:11-21). It is the final summary description of important parts of evil's pre-advent history. Revelations symbolic descriptions are remarkably intricate and complex but in the beast of chapter 17 apocalyptic symbolism's potential is tested to its very limits. We have a beast who reminds us of the Dragon and the beasts of chapter 11 and 13 but also has clear differences. The beast's heads seem to shift between hills and kings, numbers 7 and 8. The beast itself was, is and isn't, and will be. This complexity has baffled interpreters and has given rise to innumerable interpretations, some helpful and others highly improbable and bizarre.

The only way forward is to prayerfully read and re-read the chapter and the wider book of Revelation closely and sensitively. In trying to break-through the complexity of the text one temptation for interpreters is to look primarily to some kind of history to fill in the details. Preterists look to the Roman Emperors, while some futurists and historicists look to modern Popes to resolve the issue of the seven or eight kings.² It is more helpful to go to Revelations internal evidence and Scriptures own coverage of history before we look at outside history. We will briefly re-cap the major interpretations among Adventist historicists. We will not look at the preterist positions. We will then engage in a close reading of Revelation which involves textual exegesis but also what I term visual-textual exegesis. This is exegesis that looks at the visual features of the text. It can be surprisingly helpful and simple. As we trace the textual and visual clues, we will find we are in the midst of a narrative. Exegesis yields narrative. And narrative is the key.

Survey of previous views

In *Daniel and Revelation* Uriah Smith simply passes on the commonly held Millerite-Adventist view of the Beast.³ In a separate tract Smith on the first page is at pains to point out

¹ This paper is still a draft. It offers primarily a constructive position rather than critiquing other positions.

² For a discussion of Preterist views, see, See, Kenneth A. Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?," in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Book 2, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, vol. 7 of *Daniel and Revelation Committee Series* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 177-206. For evaluations of the modern Popes view, see, Marvin Moore, "The Change from Benedict XVI to Francis Is It Prophetically Significant?" <https://iadpa.org/en/blogs/news/the-change-from-benedict-xvi-to-francis-is-it-prophetically-significant>, accessed 25/06/2025. And Ekkehardt Mueller, "Pope Francis, 666, and Time Setting," <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/articles/pope-francis-666-and-time-setting>, accessed 25/06/2025.

³ Uriah Smith, *Daniel and Revelation: The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1909), 704.

that he has not innovated at all.⁴ This view sees the beast's heads as the eight forms of government that Rome has had: Kingly; Consular; Decemvirate; Dictatorial; Triumvirate; Imperial; Exarch of Ravenna; and Papal. Few modern Adventist accept such a view. It feels like a reading of Roman political history is overlaid on the text. Table 1 below is a representative sample of some of the major approaches within Adventist interpretation of Revelation 17.⁵ All of these approaches are attempts to understand what they text is saying and how it might correspond to history.

Table 1: Various Interpretative Positions on Seven-headed Beast of Revelation

Heads of the Beast	C. Mervyn Maxwell ⁶	Steve Wolberg ⁷	George McCready-Price ⁸	Ranko Stefanovic ⁹	Vanderlei Dorneles ¹⁰	Edwin Reynolds ¹¹	Ekkehardt Muller ¹²
1	Babylon	Babylon	Babylon	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt
2	Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia	Assyria	Assyria	Assyria	Assyria
3	Greece	Greece	Greece	Babylon	Babylon	Babylon	Babylon
4	Rome	Rome	Rome	Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia
5	Pagan Rome	Papacy	Papacy	Greece	Greece	Greece	Greece
6 one is	Papacy/ wounded - Abyss	USA / Lamb-like	Atheism / Abyss-Beast	Pagan Rome	Pagan Rome	Rome / Pagan and Papal	Pagan Rome
7 to come	Papacy / revived	USA / Dragon-speaking	USA / Dragon-speaking	Papacy	Papacy	USA / Earth Beast	Papacy
8 was, is not, to come	Papacy	Papacy	Papacy ¹³	Papacy	USA, Earth Beast	Dragon in Armageddon Final battle	Dragon & Millennium (Rev 20)

Looking at the table a few issues emerge. Some positions duplicate a single power. In several Papal Rome appears twice or even three times. In others the Earth-Beast/USA appears twice. It is strange that a single power accounts for more than one head. Is it justified?

⁴ Uriah Smith, "The Seven Heads of Revelation, 12, 13, and 17" (N.d.), 1.

⁵ Other important potential views not surveyed in the table include those by Austin Cooke, Sigve Tonstad, Roy C. Naden, Edwin de Kock.

⁶ C. Mervyn. Maxwell, *God Cares, Vol. 2: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family* (Boise, ID, 1985). Also similar are the views of Louis Were, Jacques Doukhan, Hans La Rondelle

⁷ Steve Wohlberg, *The Bloody Woman and the Seven-Headed Beast* (Priest River, ID: Present Truth Publications, 2021).

⁸ George McCready Price, *The Time of the End* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1967).

⁹ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Second (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009). Also similar are the views of Kenneth Stand and Jon Paulien

¹⁰ Vanderlei Dorneles, "The Eight Empire: New Hypotheses for the Symbols of Revelation 17," *Andrews University Seminary Student Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015): 17–33.

¹¹ Edwin Reynolds, "The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 93–109.

¹² Ekkehardt Mueller, *Interpreting the Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion*, Biblical Research Institute Release 1 (Biblical. Research Institute, 2005).

¹³ Of special note for later is Price's throw away comment "This does not rule out the possibility that the personal appearance of Satan impersonating Christ may be what is meant by No. 8 of this series." Price, *The Time of the End*, 46.

Positions which avoid ad hoc solutions are surely preferable. The problem deepens when the first 5 heads are all singular powers but later kings are represented by multiple heads. Why the inconsistency? The other issue is that the overall number of heads and powers don't match. For example, Wolberg really only has 6 heads/powers. The same with Maxwells view.¹⁴

Another potential problem is the inclusion of the Earth-beast within the seven heads of the beast. In Revelation 13 the Earth-beast is clearly a different power to but contemporary with the seven-headed beast. It is not a head of that beast but a separate power that helps the first beast. The chapter distinguishes rather than confuses the two. Adding the earth-beast as one of the heads adds unnecessarily complexity in order to make a viewpoint work. Despite this, there is much to commend in the work of these interpreters. I hope to build on and synthesise many features while also going beyond them.¹⁵

Visual Exegesis

Revelation is a vision that becomes a text. This is not always appreciated. True to its form the book communicates textually, intratextually, intertextually, but also visually. Exegesis of a vision needs to pay special attention to the visual features of the text which are often paramount.¹⁶ John testifies to what he "saw" (1:2) and is commanded to write what he has "seen" (1:11,19). What he has seen is not static two-dimensional pictures but more like an animation with scenes, characters, plot and development. Obviously, if who cannot read or hear Revelation, you cannot see it. But equally true, if you cannot see Revelation, you cannot read or understand it. We should expect the visual and textual evidence to converge and complement each other.

Visuals in Revelation 12 and 13

Much of Revelation revolves around the conflict between its protagonist and antagonist. Visually they are starkly different. One is a hideous monster (Rev 12:3). The other a Lamb (Rev 5:6). The Dragon, in giving a throne and power to the beast, mimics God the Father, who shares his throne and power with the Lamb. But in another sense the Dragon mimics the Lamb in that he has a rival 10 horns to the Lamb's 7, and he is likewise worshipped (Table 2). The Dragon is seeking to displace both God and the Lamb. The hubris is astonishing. In Revelation 4-5 at the centre is God, the Lamb, and the Seven Spirits of God. As Revelation 12-20 progresses we see the Dragon conjures beasts who mimic the Lamb and the Spirit.

¹⁴ You could argue that Reynolds view which combines two traditionally distinct powers in the 6th head (Pagan and Papal Rome) in effect has 9 powers.

¹⁵ Another question this comparison raises is, whether we begin the seven heads with Egypt or Babylon? Two decisions need to be made. One concerns timing, the other concerns OT background. Is the time of the sixth here ("one is") in John's Day or the future? If John's day then the head is Pagan Rome. This is the simplest natural explanation. I accept this as correct. If it is a different time, then other positions must justify such a claim. Because the issue of timing is internal to the text it has precedence over the external allusion. As for OT background: Should Revelation 17 be read as replicating Daniel 7's heads (thus starting with Babylon) or is the vision drawing on wider beast/dragon references within Scripture (Egypt). I take Revelation 17 to be a final summary of the wider history long conflict between the Beast/beasts and Christ. Egypt is the first beastly kingdom power to oppress God's people. Also the beasts seven heads reflect the Dragons. Surely the seven heads of the Dragon who is the template for the beast and goes back to Eden (ancient serpent), don't start with Babylon.

¹⁶ For example, the well-known "I heard ... I saw" John often employs (Rev 1:10,12; 5:5,6).

Table 2: Comparison of Dragon and Lamb

Dragon	Lamb
10 horns Worshiped	7 horns Worshiped

In Revelations visual symbolism of heaven, the Lamb is unique, no other heavenly being looks like him. The Dragon is different in this regard. He works through proxies and one of them, the Sea-beast (Rev 13:1), looks just like him, having seven heads and ten horns (see Table 3). Like Father, like Son. The Sea-Beast is the ‘son’ of the Dragon.

Table 3: Comparison of Dragon and Sea-Beast

Dragon	Sea-Beast
Seven heads 10 horns Gives throne Gives power Worshiped	Seven heads 10 horns Receives throne Receives power Worshiped

Thus far the visual symbolism is fascinatingly congruent. The Dragon opposes the Lamb and looks very different to him, while the Dragon’s proxies look like him. All this is broken when the dragonic Sea-Beast shockingly mimics the Lamb. Like the Lamb, the Sea-Beast undergoes a fatal wounding and healing (Rev 13:3) in imitation of the death and resurrection of the Lamb (see Table 4). Like Jesus the Sea-Beast has a 3 ½ year ministry and receives a throne, authority and power from his ‘Father’. The vision presents the Dragon and Sea-beast as mimicking the activity of God the Father and Jesus the Son. The prophecy forecast a future satanic parody in post-apostolic history where a powerful kingdom will mimic Jesus Christ.

Table 4: Comparison of Sea-Beast and Lamb

Lamb	Sea-Beast
7 horns Shares throne Receives power Worshiped As if slain Purchases by blood from every tribe, nation, language, nation	10 horns Receives throne Receives power Worshiped As if slain Given authority over every tribe, nation, language, nation

We can finally line up the three actors. When this is done the identity of the Sea-Beast becomes clearer. This is the Dragon’s attempt at an earthly kingdom attempting to imitate and replace or stand in the place of the Lamb. The Sea-beast is the antichrist.

Table 5: Comparison of Dragon, Sea-Beast and Lamb

Dragon	Sea-Beast	Lamb
Seven heads	Seven heads	
10 horns	10 horns	7 horns
Gives throne	Receives throne	Shares throne
Gives power	Receives power	Receives power
Worshipped	Worshipped	Worshipped
	As if slain	As if slain
	Given authority over every tribe, nation, language, nation	Purchases by blood from every tribe, nation, language, nation

Table 5 shows how helpful it is to compare the visual descriptions and actions between characters. The Sea-beast is depicted in such a way as to evoke both Dragon and Lamb. It looks like the Dragon but mimics the lamb. We have a ‘dragonic’ lamb! This is confusing. Revelation’s textual and visual presentation is meant to evoke in the reader a sense of bewilderment. The reader is left in no doubt that the Sea-Beast is on the Dragons side but also that the beast is seeking to replace the Lamb and that it experiences a measure of success. People worship the beast.

Revelation 17 is not Revelation 13

How does this relate to Revelation 17? How is the Sea-beast of Rev 13 related to the Beast from the Abyss (“Abyss-Beast” hereafter) in Rev 17? They are related but they are not simply identical. There are too many differences between the chapters. Each must be allowed to tell its story in its own way. In chapter 17 we have no mention of an Earth-beast or the mark of the beast or the image to the beast. We have no mention of the Dragon (who features prominently in Rev 13). In chapter 17 we have a new figure, briefly and enigmatically mentioned earlier as Babylon the Great (Rev 14:8), but now fully visualised as a Harlot woman. She is no minor symbol and sits on the beast and rules the kings of the earth. Even the beast itself is different, instead of a single head being wounded (Rev 13:3), all of the heads are sequentially focused on and involved. In Rev 13 the beasts ten horns have crowns but are completely static. In Rev 17 the horns have no crowns but are transformed into dynamic actors who partner with the Abyss-Beast to initially support the Harlot then later destroy her. Both the Abyss-Beast and Sea-Beast have seven heads and ten horns like the Dragon but only the Abyss-Beast (scarlet) is similar in colour to the Dragon (red). We should not overread Rev 13’s narrative of the Sea-beast into the Abyss-beast as if they are simply the same identical power.

Chapter 17 is not a restatement or representation of chapter 13. It is its own new visionary story which covers history that is both earlier (five fallen kingdoms) and later (Babylon’s future fall) than chapter 13. John is told the mystery of the Beasts heads: “They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.” (Rev 17:10 NIV). Five kingdoms had fallen before the one (“one is”) ruling in John’s Day. This identifies the sixth kingdom as Pagan Rome. The five before Rome are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia,

Greece. After pagan Rome is the seventh head or Papal Rome.¹⁷ The use of the number seven symbolises a complete line of earthly kingdoms. The seventh head is the last one and therefore continues until the very end of time as we see in Rev 13; 16:12-14; 19:19-20. The heads are a sequence of proxies through which the Dragon has worked. In Rev 12:5 the proxy is Pagan Rome, in Rev 12:13-15 it is Papal Rome. Rev 17 pictures not just one but a whole historical line of them. The seven heads of the Abyss-Beast are a vast historical summary that stretches from many kingdoms before Rome to the very end of history. The scope and scale of Revelation 17 is much bigger than Revelation 13.

The Eighth King

Earlier Table 1 showed us the conflicting views about the Beast. The disagreement increases when we look at heads/kings 6, 7, and 8. At this stage our interpretation has been most like that of Kenneth Strand, Jon Paulien, Ranko Stefanovic and Ekkehard Muller. But to understand who the eighth king is we will need to keep ‘looking’ and pay close attention to all textual, intertextual, and visual clues, and especially the intratextual visual kaleidoscope the book has built up in telling its story. We read, “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And those who live on the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was, and is not, and will come” (17:8 NASV). There are two words often translated as ‘come’ in many translations of 17:8. In the first half of the verse the beast is said to ‘come up’ (NIV) or ‘ascend’ (NASV) from the Abyss. This word is ἀναβαίνειν and means to go up. Of more interest is the word in the second half of the verse which says that the earth-dwellers “will *wonder* when they *see* the beast, that he was, and is not, and *will come*.” The astonishment and wonder of the world is linked to the moment they ‘see’ the Beast who will ‘come.’ The word ‘come’ is πάρεσται (future indicative middle of παρείμι) and means to ‘come’ or be ‘present.’ While this is not the exact same word as παρουσία which is often used to describe the Second Coming of Christ, they are closely related as παρουσία derives from παρείμι.¹⁸ This Abyss-Beast has its own coming or appearance and it parallels Christ’s Second Coming (see Table 6). The words for coming in Rev 1:6 and Matt 24:30 are forms of ἔρχομαι. However, in Matt 24 παρουσία (vs 27) and ἔρχομαι (vs 30) are used interchangeably to refer to the Second Coming. Conceptually they can refer to the same event. What is important is that in all three passages of Matt 24:30, Rev 1:6 and Rev 17:8 we have 1) a figure ‘coming’, 2) the use of synonymous terms (παρουσία, ἔρχομαι, παρείμι), 3) the figure is seen by the world, and 4) induces a strong reaction from the watching world (wonder or mourning). The wicked world is amazed at the false Christ but mourns the true Christ. Rev 17:8 depicts the last deception before the second coming in which Satan in earthly kingly proxy form appears on earth as a false Christ. Jesus warned about false Christs in Matt 24. Most of these are purely human false Christs but Rev 17 indicates the last one will be Satan himself.¹⁹ His appearance will be the most impressive. While historical false Christs have been able to gather small numbers of human followers. Revelation 17 indicates that Satan will be able to captivate the entire world. All will wonder after him.

¹⁷ Here I assume and build on the argumentation of Strand, Stefanovic, Paulien, and Mueller.

¹⁸ “παρουσία, an abstract term based on παρείμι.” Albrecht Oepke, “Παρουσία, Πάρεμι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Gerhard Kittel, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 859.

¹⁹ Paul indicates that deceptive human impersonation and masquerading is a reflection Satan who has impersonated as a serpent (2Cor 11:3) and masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:13-15). Human impersonation as a false Christ suggests that Satan will do that same.

Table 6: The Second Coming of Jesus Christ in Rev 1 and Matt 24 compared to the Abyss-Beast

Jesus Christ	Abyss-Beast
<p><i>Revelation 1:6</i> He is coming Every eye will see him All will mourn</p> <p><i>Matthew 24:30</i> All will mourn When they see Son of Man coming</p>	<p><i>Revelation 17:8</i> Will come/be present When they see him All will wonder</p>

The allusions whereby the Abyss-Beast mimics the description of the Second Coming in Rev 1:6, may also have a parallel with the symbolic description of the Second Coming at the end of the book (see Table 7). In Rev 19 Jesus is the war making King of Kings who destroys his enemies. Likewise, the Abyss-Beast presents itself as a King of Kings who makes war on his enemies.

Table 7: Comparison of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in Rev 19 and the Abyss-Beast

The Coming of the Beast/Eight Head	The Second Coming of Christ
<p><i>Revelation 17</i> The beast you saw ...will come</p> <p>an Eighth King with Ten Kings (a King with Kings)</p> <p>makes war against the Lamb</p>	<p><i>Revelation 19</i> I saw ...Rider on White horse</p> <p>King of Kings and Lord of Lords</p> <p>with justice ... makes war</p>

It is also interesting to notice the change and development in the Dragons mimicking of Jesus Christ. In Rev 13 the Dragon works through the Sea-Beast to mimic the First Coming ministry of Jesus, whereas in Rev 17 Satan as the Abyss-Beast counterfeits the Second Coming! There is progression and development. At the beginning of Christian history, the Dragon tries to counterfeit the beginning. At the end the Dragon tries to counterfeit the end! The word Anti-Christ describes one who seeks to be in place of Christ. In prophecies developing story we have an historical version of the antichrist substituting himself for Christ's earthly ministry (Rev 13), and at the end we have an eschatological version of antichrist substituting himself for Christ's heavenly return (Rev 17:8).²⁰

²⁰ Paul's description in 2 Thess 2:3-12 of the 'coming' of the Lawless One (in contrast to the coming of Jesus in 2 Thess 2:8) may blend these two stages of antichrist (an historical appearance and an eschatological

Table 8: Historical and Eschatological Dimensions of Antichrist.

Historical Anti-Christ	Eschatological Anti-Christ
<p><i>Revelation 13</i> Sea-Beast (7th head)</p> <p>Parodies the First Coming of Jesus and his earthly ministry</p>	<p><i>Revelation 17</i> Abyss-Beast (8th head)</p> <p>Parodies the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth</p>

Relationship of Beast and Dragon to the Abyss and Each Other

Both the Abyss-Beast (Rev 17:8) and the Dragon (Rev 20:1) are related to the Abyss. The beast ascends from the Abyss and the Dragon is cast into the Abyss and then released from it. Is the Dragons release the same as the beasts ascent? The description of the eighth head coming out of the Abyss could be a proleptic description of the Dragon in Rev 20 as some seem to argue.²¹ Is the connection of beast and the Abyss a direct reference to the end of the millennium? It could be and would not require significant changes to this overall position (see table).²²

Table 9: Potential different timings (A or B) of the Beasts ascent out of the Abyss:

17:8a	Was	Is not	<i>A) will ascend out of the Abyss?</i>	<i>B) will ascend out of the Abyss?</i> be led away to its destruction.
17:8b	Was	Is not	And yet will come	
17:11	Was	Is not	is an eighth king He belongs to the seven	and is going to his destruction.
<i>Rev 12 + 13</i>		<i>Rev 11</i>	<i>Rev 17</i>	<i>Rev 20</i>

However, I think that Revelation wants us to see these as two similar but not identical events. The Abyss-Beast looks like the Dragon as described in Rev 12 but he does not act the same. In Rev 12 the Dragon attacked a woman while the Abyss-Beast supports a woman who sits on his back. In Rev 12 the Dragon tries to prematurely end the First Advent work of Jesus (Rev 12:4,5). In Rev 17 the Beast tries to mimic the Second Advent of Christ but lacking the glory and character of Christ the grotesque parody fails. All the Abyss-Beast is capable of is mimicking the final violent and defeated activity of Satan at the end of the millennium in Rev 20. Try as he might, he cannot escape his own character and losing strategy. The Abyss-Beast looks like the Dragon in Rev 12 but acts like the Dragon in Rev 20. While unsuccessfully

appearance) which is only clarified here in Rev 17 as referring two stages where the first is intensified in the second.

²¹ See the views of Edwin Reynold and Ekkehardt Mueller

²² I would need to distinguish between the coming or appearance of the beast as eighth king from his later ascent as Satan at end of the millennium (see the B option in Table 9).

mimicking the return of Jesus, he ends up anticipating the failed eschatological actions of Satan at the end of the millennium.

The parallels between the Abyss-Beast and the Dragons final activity in Rev 20 are clear. Both are connected to the Abyss. Both have the wicked follow them on mass. Both attack a City. Both fail. The differences are equally clear. When the beast himself appears or emerges from the Abyss he becomes the eighth beastly king who unites the ten horns to attack the harlot and fight the Lamb. In contrast the Dragon unites the innumerable resurrected wicked host, ‘Gog and Magog’ and together they attack the Holy City. The beast comes up from the Abyss after a non-descript period of time (when he “is not”), while the Dragon is released following a different and very specific time period (1000 years).²³ As the eighth king who is the last stage of the earlier seven kingdom heads, the beast belongs to the pre-advent and pre-millennial flow of history. The beast is not the millennially imprisoned Dragon. As the eighth kingly manifestation of the beast, Satan is still in a proxy form as the counterfeiting Christ, but during the millennium Satan is not visualised or symbolised as an eighth king or a beast, he’s just Satan. He is no longer disguised as a proxy. He is who he is. Table 10 helpfully diagrams the similarities and differences between these two eschatological activities of Satan.

Table 10: Similarities and Differences between the Abyss-Beast and Satan in Rev 17 and Rev 20.

Similarities

The Beast Revelation 17	“was”	“is not”	From the Abyss	World wonders after him	Attacks a City	Goes to destruction
Satan/Dragon Revelation 20	(Was active)	Bound in the Abyss (1000 years)	Goes into the Abyss	Deceives the nations	Attacks a City	Is destroyed

Differences

The Beast Revelation 17	The Beast Eighth head	Ascend up/ Come up from the Abyss	Partners with 10 Horns	Attacks and destroys the Great City Babylon	Lead away to his destruction
Satan/Dragon Revelation 20	Dragon, Satan, the Devil	Released from the Abyss	Partners with nations / Gog and Magog	Attacks and fails to destroy the Holy City New Jerusalem	Instantly destroyed (not lead away)

Revelation 17 and 20 are describing similar activity in parallel but different scenes. Fallen history repeats in Rev 20 for one last time. Here is the monotony of Satan and his incurable rebellion. He tries again and again to destroy. Whenever he gets another chance, he seeks to bring down God’s work. His most daring, desperate, and spectacular attempts are his last ones at the end of history and at the end of the millennium. His consistent character underlies the similarity in action.

²³ There are other potential subtle differences in the wording between Rev 17 and Rev 20. In Rev 17 the Beast will be lead away (ὑπάγει) to destruction but not immediately destroyed. The phrase is used by Jesus in Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21 to refer to the start of the long series of trials and indignities which climax in his crucifixion. In Rev 13:10 it also refers to the leading away of someone into captivity (similar to the Dragons millennial captivity?). In contrast Rev 20 has Satan released from the Abyss, attacking the Holy City and then immediately destroyed. After exiting the Abyss, he is not ‘lead away’ to destruction, he is destroyed.

The Abyss, and Satan's interaction with it, appears several times in Revelation (Rev 9, 11, 17, 20). It is not confined to Rev 20. Based on these multiple references the Abyss, is a place devoid of God but not outside his control, and describes a situation where some kind of evil activity is being restrained until a particular point in time. In Rev 9 the locust army is restrained in the Abyss until released by the fallen star. In Rev 11 the beast is restrained from overcoming the two witnesses until they have completed their testimony. In Rev 17 what is restrained is the beast appearing as a false Christ and causing astonishment to the earth's onlookers, allying with the Ten Kings, and warring against the Lamb.²⁴ The broader intratextual and visual parallels can be seen in Table 11. Just as we noted earlier (Table 5) the value of comparing visual descriptions and actions, so we can see a similar benefit in Table 11.

Table 11: Visual-Textual Parallels between Jesus, the Abyss-Beast and the Dragon/Satan

Jesus Christ	Abyss-Beast / 8 th king	Satan/Dragon
<div> <i>Revelation 1</i> He is coming Every eye will see him All will mourn </div>	<div> Scarlet Seven Heads 10 Horns Will come/be present When they see him All will wonder Ascends from the Abyss Wars against Lamb/saints Attacks a City Is lead away to be destroyed </div>	<div> <i>Revelation 12</i> Red Seven Heads 10 Horns </div> <div> <i>Revelation 20</i> Released from the Abyss Wars against God/saints Attacks a City Is destroyed </div>

Putting it all together.

Now we are in a position to put all this together and deal with some objections. The Dragon/Beast symbol is ultimately Satan with the seven heads or seven kings/kingdoms as proxy powers he works through. The five who had fallen are: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece. The one reigning in John's day is pagan Rome and is followed by the seventh head which is Papal Rome. The seventh head lasts until the Second Coming. Neither Dragon nor Beast have eight heads. The eighth king is not an extra head and so does not replace or displace the seventh – it will continue to the End. The Beast is himself the eighth king (ἐστὶν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός). The verse is emphatic. The final appearance of the beast is by the Beast himself. This is not simply one stage or power such as a head. It is the transhistorical power behind all of the heads, Satan himself. But he visibly 'comes' as if he is the returning Christ. This beast has three phases of activity. He "was" (the seven heads), he was "not" (explained below), and he comes and reigns as an eighth king.

²⁴ In an earlier footnote we raised the possibility of a hidden dual reference to the predicted appearance or coming of the antichrist in Paul's comments in 2 Thess. In 2 Thess 2:6,7 Paul speaks of a restrainer holding back the appearing of the antichrist. This is similar to the idea of the Abyss as a place of restraint on evil activity. If true, a restraint is placed by God on both the timing of the historical and eschatological manifestations of antichrist.

The ‘is not’ phase of the beast is a break in the sequence, it is the paradox of a beast which is and is not. “Is not” does not mean actual non-existence or real death. A head wound to only one of seven heads beast does not result in death to such a beast. As “is not” it cannot be one of the seven heads or powers. It also cannot be when the Beast is visibly seen as the eighth King. It must be a mode or period in between stages 7 and 8. So what is it? This is the time when the beast does not operate as one of the defined kingdoms/heads but still operates in the beastly form of raw secular political power/s. It parallels the time when the seventh head is wounded. It is described in the activity of the Abyss-Beast in Revelation 11. In Rev 11 the focus is on the two Witnesses. The Abyss-Beast is briefly referenced as attacking the Witnesses (Rev 11:7). This activity of the Abyss-Beast is intensely anti-Scripture.²⁵ It appears and shapes the spiritual conditions within the Great City so that it is described as anti-theistic (spiritually Egypt), anti-Jesus (spiritually Jerusalem), and sexually permissive (spiritually Sodom, see Rev 11:8). This spiritually anti-Scriptural, anti-theistic, anti-Christian violent exercise of political power is characteristic of certain strains of modern political power which burst onto the world scene in the French revolution (and continue thereafter in various ways). This “is not” phrase can also be described as the beast being in the Abyss, where the Abyss is the place and state of being restrained from acting in a specific way. The action restrained is the counterfeiting of Christ’s Second Advent. The beast, as the final eighth king, is restrained and prevented from acting until the last moments of history. The complex beast symbol, with its many moving parts (7 heads / 3 phased beast), draws from Scriptural narratives and weaves multiple stories together at the same time (see Table 12). This is why wisdom is needed to understand its mystery.

Table 12: Multiple-Complementary Narratives Embedded in the Composite Beast

The Heads	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		(8 th king/ not a head)
Phases of the Heads	Five have Fallen					One is	Not yet come		Beast himself comes/appears seen by world
Phases of the Beast	Was (as 7 heads)							is not	Is an 8 th ‘King’
Historical Powers	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Assyria</i>	<i>Babylon</i>	<i>Medo-Persia</i>	<i>Greece</i>	Rome	Papacy: Collective Historical Antichrist	Anti-God Secular power/s (No head)	Beast itself: Individual Eschatological Antichrist

Our basic presentation is now complete. Hopefully it can be seen that this position helps resolve some problems which appears in other views. One challenge is that Adventists have usually interpreted the beast of Rev 11 and Rev 13 as very different powers (atheism vs papacy). Also, while Adventists have favoured the papacy as the Beast/8th king in Rev 17 some have confused the situation even more by adding the Earth-Beast/USA to the mix. Based on the common designation (beast: θηρίον), and shared features (seven heads/ten horns or connections to the Abyss), others have rigidly insisted that we have the same entity in Rev

²⁵ I am following the interpretation of the two witnesses as referring to the Scriptures, see Ekkehardt Müller, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13, no. 2 (2002): 30–45.

11, 13 and 17. This is close reading but not close enough. Table 13 indicates that the Beasts in 11 and 13 have differences and yet both are represented by the beast in 17.

Table 13: Comparing the Beast in Rev 11, 13, and 17.

Rev 11	Rev 13	Rev 17
From the Abyss	Seven heads Ten horns	Seven heads Ten horns From the Abyss

The problems revolve when we remember all beast symbolism and imagery goes back to the Dragon (see Table 14). The beasts are different earthy proxy-powers that Satan has used and together they help tell the story of the Dragon and reflect different stages of his war against Christ. We do not need to over-identify the beasts in different chapters. While Rev 17 unifies the differences in 11 and 13, the Dragon unifies 11, 13, and 17.

Table 14: Comparing the Beasts and the Dragon.

Rev 11	Rev 13	Rev 17	Rev 12/20
From the Abyss	Seven heads Ten horns	Seven heads Ten horns Scarlet From the Abyss Goes to destruction	Seven heads Ten horns Red From the Abyss Goes to destruction

The beast in Revelation 17 is a composite symbol which enables narrative-layering to be encoded within it. This beast contains simultaneous true narratives, but not all are simultaneously narrated and expressed. The beast contains within itself the stories of aggression by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Pagan Rome (Rev 12), Papal Rome (Rev 13), and I would add political atheism/antitheism (Rev 11). But these are quickly passed over and unexpressed. The narrative which is explicitly expressed is that of the Beast itself or Satan himself as final eighth king. When the world is described as wondering and marvelling at the Sea-Beast in Rev 13:3,8 following the healing of its wound, it is telling the story of the seventh head (“one of its heads” 13:3). The same language of the world wondering and marvelling at the beast in Rev 17:8 is used to describe the eighth king (not the seventh head!) when the world *sees* him when he *comes/appears*. Seeing and coming are not features in Rev 13. The beast symbol contains the story of the seventh head/seventh stage but only expresses the story of the eighth king/eighth stage.²⁶ This means there is no conflict in using the same language to describe slightly different parts of a wider story in which history

²⁶ Another potential objection (which faces other similar positions) is that if the seventh head is the papacy and the harlot is to some degree the papacy then you have the contradiction of a woman sitting on herself! Or redundant symbolism and bad interpretation. However, the heads have two symbolic meanings. They are hills and also kings. The woman sits on the 7 hills – she doesn’t sit on the 7 heads. The seventh head can be the papacy narrated in Rev 13 but it is not narrated in Rev 17. Within Rev 17 the religious aspect of the papacy is pictured as part of the Harlot Babylon the Great. This reflects the historical changes to papal power. Rev 13 also reflects this change. In the early career of the Sea-beast it exerts its own power (Rev 13:1-10) but later after its wound is healed it is dependent on the Earth Beast in verses 12-18. This second stage is more like the Harlot who sits on the Beast.

repeats and intensifies. The world's wondering at the seventh king in Rev 13 is due to its healing from death, the world's wondering at the eighth king in Rev 17 is due to its visible appearing before the world. Carefully interpreting the nuances in meaning suggests that the as per Rev 13 the papacy will recover its power to worldwide wonderment and sometime later (8 is after 7 and the "is not" phase), as per Rev 17, Satan will 'come/appear' to even greater wonderment. The seventh-head or the historical anti-Christ will exercise its power in concert with the Advent-counterfeiting-eschatological anti-Christ. The seventh head is transcended by the eight, but it is not eliminated or even replaced. The number seven indicates the final head. It must last to the end. Eighth is an addition not a replacement. This embedded layering re-emerges when we see that at Christ's Second Coming the beast (think seven heads) alongside the False Prophet is thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19:19,20) while the Dragon/Satan (think eighth king) is cast into the Abyss for a thousand years (Rev 20:1,2)

The Abyss-Beast symbol in Revelation is layered. It has a sequence of 7 historical kingdoms. That is a lot of layers. Another layer is the beast that was, is not, will come. The Abyss-Beast is not simply the beast as in Rev 11 or Rev 13. Those are each but a single layer. This is the problem with views that rigidly try and make the Abyss-Beast an identical reference to the Sea-Beast of Revelation 13. They are partly right and completely wrong.²⁷

Conclusion

Revelation 17's mysterious and highly detailed depiction of the Abyss-Beast is the final revelation in the Bible of the extensive proxy activity of Satan in such a way to co-ordinate the previous, partial and disparate depictions of the historical beastly figures (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Pagan Rome, Papal Rome) and detail his final deceptive activity. This final activity by Satan which climaxes his long history of hostility, deception, and impersonation, is the daring and blasphemous counterfeiting of Jesus Second Coming. Only those whose minds have been saturated and shaped by Scripture and the book of Revelation will be able to see through this deception.

²⁷ One of the strengths of the Stefanovic/Paulien/Strand view that papacy is both 7th and 8th kings is that it can be read as a parody of the death and resurrection of Christ (8 can be a symbol of resurrection as the resurrection on the '8th' day came after the 7th). Advocates argue that the Sea-Beast experiences a death/wounding ("is not" and goes into the Abyss) and a resurrection/healing (comes out of the Abyss) and that corresponds to A) its wounding as the 7th head and B) time of death (Abyss) and C) its return (resurrection) to power as the 8th. This is a very good argument and much to commend it. But such language can also be seen as the beast paralleling Christ's first advent, followed by his absence or "is not" period (John 13:13, 36; 14:3,19; 16:16), and then followed by his Parousia or Coming. One view is working from the micro-pattern of Jesus' earthly life and the other is the macro-pattern of Christ's wider career embracing both of his Advents. I have already indicated that the composite and layered symbolism of the Abyss-Beast allows for a collective-historical-antichrist in the seventh head (papacy) and an individual-eschatological-antichrist (Satan) in the eighth head. The first mimics the micro-pattern of Jesus' earthly life and the second mimics the macro-pattern of Christ's wider historical career. This is without contradiction of each other. This is also done without appealing to a method of dual fulfilment. My position is that Rev 17 adds additional and not previously clarified information of an extra final eighth stage to the beast's previously prophesied seven heads. It is not that the seventh head has a dual fulfilment, no, it is that seventh head and new extra eighth king overlap, reflect each other, and co-exist at the very end (and will work together). The eighth king is a supernatural eschatological intensification of the historical antichrist.