

Lady Babylon and the Seven-Headed, Ten-Horned Beast

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Introduction / Abstract

The present study focuses on the emblematic symbols in the apocalyptic vision of Revelation 17: the great courtesan Babylon, the seven-headed, ten-horned beast, and the unnatural relationship between the woman and the beast. The study first examines the identity of Lady Babylon, understood as dynamic and cumulative, emphasizing her major sins of diluting divine truth with human errors and of merging religion with political power. Next, the identity of the beast and its seven heads is analyzed, with particular attention to the contemporary roles of the sixth and seventh heads (mountain kingdoms), and the identity and placement of the ten horn-kings, which we argue are crucial for interpreting this prophecy. Finally, the study identifies the eighth political power — the beast itself, described as “one of the seven” — as Satan appearing visibly on the political stage, and explores how Lady Babylon will ultimately be punished.

The Dramatic and Temporal Frame of Revelation 17

Revelation 17 serves an explanatory scene, an excursus to the 7th bowl (Rev 16:17–21), where Babylon was already mentioned (verse 19). The interpreting angel, who is not by chance one of the seven angels with bowls, speaks to John in the historical present, within the context of the Roman Empire. The angel looks back at the successive world powers, and points forward, to the end of the time of trouble, when the scarlet beast and its horns (kings), will overthrow and destroy the deadly courtesan, Lady Babylon. The moral of this prophetic allegory is that the judgment God has decreed upon Babylon (17:1) consists in her being punished by her own lovers,¹ for whose sake she betrayed her true Lord and God.

Thus the prophecy points out to the time of the fall of Babylon, which is announced by the second angel in Revelation 14:8, and by the powerful angel in Revelation 18, within

¹ Compare Rev 17:1-2, 16-17 to Jer 4:30-31; Ezek 16:37-41; 23:22-35.

the context of the universal test of worship.² While we usually comment on the spiritual fall of the mystical Babylon, rightly illustrating it by the cry of the powerful angel of Rev 18:2-3, the prophetic source of this cry (Is 21:9; Jer 51:8, 11) points out to Babylon's political and physical fall. Revelation 17 describes her worst immoral affair, which is rapidly followed by her physical collapse, to be mourned in chapter 18.

The Identity of Lady Babylon

The interpreting angel called John to see God's "verdict upon the great harlot-city who sits on that large waterway (i.e. Euphrates)" (Rev 17:1).³ Since cities are personified as women in the Biblical imagery, the great city on the great river Euphrates is naturally depicted as a woman. In his extatic vision, John saw in the wilderness a woman sitting on a seven-headed and ten-horned monster. The woman bears on her forehead the mystical name of "Babylon the Great, mother of all harlots and of the abominations of the earth" (v. 2-6).

She is described as a deadly courtesan, a royal mistress, making "love" with the kings of the world and giving all nations to get drunk from the cup of wine of her hot prostitution. Dressed in purple and scarlet red as a queen, garnished in gold, precious stones and pearls, and wearing underwears of fine linen (cf. 18:16), her luring outward adornment cannot hide her true character: she is adulterous, harlot, bloody persecutor of Christ's followers (17:6). The interpreting angel shows that this bad woman is "the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (v. 18), sitting on seven mountains (v. 9), the world's commercial center (Rev 18:3, 11-13), the corrupter of the nations (Rev 17:2; 18:3; 19:2). She

² Rev 13:8, 16-18; 14:6-7, 9-12; 19:2-3.

³ Biblical quotations without reference are our translation. The expression ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων τῶν πολλῶν (with Genitive, "on the many waters") is an old Hebrew idiom. The Hebrew equivalent of this idiom in Jer 51:13 (ἐφ' ὕδασι πολλοῖς, with Dative: "on the many waters") is *'al mayim rabbim*. In Hebrew, *mayim* (water) is always in plural ("waters"), and it refers either to the element, or to a body of water. In this context, the expression "many waters" clearly refers to Euphrates, the large waterway (body of water) on/by which Babylon was sited (Jer 51:12-13, 63; Rev 9:14; 16:12; 18:21).

functions as a parody of Zion/Jerusalem⁴ and, at the same time, as the embodiment of the ancient Sumero-Babylonian cultic system.⁵

Pagan Rome

For any Jew or Christian in the time of John, this garnished and cruel Lady Babylon was a code name for Rome. A Roman coin minted in 71 AD depicts a woman seated on seven hills beside the Tiber River.⁶ This imagery clearly corresponds to the Roman Empire of the first Christian centuries, particularly to its state religion, which acted as the chief instigator against Christians.

Nonetheless, the angelic explanations in prophecy are only hints to more comprehensive historical realities to be revealed towards the time of the end. Maybe the amazement of John, when he saw the woman, is also a hint to a deeper historical application. Maybe John have seen in that woman a lurid future of God's people, from whom many would apostatize by adopting the pagan politics and traditions of the Imperial Rome (cf. 2Tes 2:3-12). If not, why did he wonder so much? He had witnessed the persecution of Nero, and now the persecution of Domitian was in course. Was it a secret that Pagan Rome was bloodthirsty?

⁴ See Ps 87:1, of Zion City ("her foundations are on the holy mountains"). In the Book of Enoch (chapter LII / 52:1-9) seven metal mountains "serve the dominion of His [God's] Anointed." In 4Esdras 2:10, 17, 19 (Jerusalem, "the mother of children", for whom God prepared "seven mighty mountains, whereupon there grow roses and lilies"); EW 18.2 ("...on the mount [Zion] was a glorious temple, and about it were seven other mountains, on which grew roses and lilies").

⁵ Lady Babylon, sitting on her seven mountains mentioned in verse 9, may also reflect mythological language inherited from Mesopotamia, where "the seven mountains" were associated with the netherworld, ruled by the goddess Ereshkigal ("Lady of the Great Earth"). Cf. Wikipedia, "Mesopotamian underworld"; See also Konstantopoulos, Gina V., "There are Seven...", PhD dissertation in Near Eastern Studies, The University of Michigan, 2015, pag. 16 online; Reiner, Erica, ed., *The Assyrian Dictionary*, volume 15, S, sebe, 2', Oriental Institute of Chicago, Illinois, 1984, 2000, p. 203.

⁶ See 1 Pt 5:13, where Peter mentions the "chosen [church] in Babylon (= Rome)". The apocryphon 2Esdras / 4 Ezra, written about the time of John's Revelation, namely after the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD), frequently mentions "Babylon" (3:1-2, 28, 31; 15:43, 46, 60; 16:1) which cannot be anything but Rome. Cf. Charles, R. H. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, London, 1913, pp. 233-245. See also CNG online (Classical Numismatic Group), Feature Auction, "The Seven Hills of Rome".
<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=184449>

The Synagogue of Satan

The Jews, who rejected Jesus Christ, became themselves Babylon, or an errant daughter of Babylon. They used to join pagan authorities against their Christian brethren.⁷ Therefore, Jesus repeatedly called the apostate and hostile Synagogue “the Synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9; 3:9). Even the apocalyptic image of the great harlot is borrowed from the Prophets who spoke against the infidel Jerusalem.⁸ “The great city” is called not only “Sodom” and “Egypt”, but also the place where our Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8 *υ*cf. Is 1:9; Ez 16:46). Jesus described the Jews of His time as guilty of the blood of prophets.⁹ No wonder that some authors identified the great harlot with the Synagogue.¹⁰ Indeed, by rejecting the true Messiah, involving in world politics and persecuting the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem,¹¹ the Jews also became part of the mystical Babylon. Therefore, Jesus’ warning of fleeing from Jerusalem to the mountains (Mt 24:15-18), and the Spirit’s urge to come out of the Jewish camp (Heb 13:12-14) are analogous to the coming out of Babylon (Rev 18:4).

⁷ Just as the Jews (priests and mob) accused Jesus before Pilate’s praetorium (Jn 19:12, cf. AA 17:7); as Christians in the first century have been accused by Jews before the Roman authorities (FA 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:6-8, 13; 18:12-13; 19:9; 20:19; 23:12, 20-21; 24:1, 5, 9; 25:1-2, 7, 14-15, 24; Rev 2:9; 3:9), similarly the later Jews seem to have joined the Roman persecutors against their Christian brethren. Tertullian (c. 204) noted that the synagogues were “fountains of persecutions”, and most probably their hostility against Jewish or Gentile Christians continued until the Christian Roman Empire began to severely persecute Jews and destroy their synagogues. (See Rev. Edward Krause, “Forgotten Facts in the History of Jewish Christian Relations”, Christendom Media <https://media.christendom.edu/1988/01/forgotten-facts-in-the-history-of-jewish-christian-relations/>).

⁸ Various descriptions of Babylon in the Book of Revelation are combined echoes and reminiscences from Prophets about the destiny of Jerusalem as well as Babylon. (Compare, for example, Rev 17:16 to Ezek 23:22-23, 26, 29).

⁹ Compare Mt 23:34-37; Lk 11:47-51; 13:13 to Rev 17:6; 18:20,24 where similar phrases are used in charging the bloodguilt to Babylon.

¹⁰ Baldwin of Caterbury (Balduinus Cantuariensis 1120?-1190) in his Latin writing “De Sacramento Altaris”, discussing of the chalice, he contrasted the Church with “the unbelieving synagogue”, and quoted from Jer 51:7 (in Migne, J. P., *Patrologia latina*, vol. 204. ed. Parisiis: excudebat Migne, 1855, 0724D, [Patrologia Latina Database](#), online edition. [The Wikipedia article “Whore of Babylon”](#), mentions under the heading “Jerusalem” a lot of Biblical scholars who applied the symbolism of the whore of Babylon refers to the apostate queen of the spiritual realm, the former ‘bride’ who became unfaithful.”

¹¹ Gal 4:25-26, 29, Heb 12:22; cf. Rev 11:8.

Including Apostate Christendom and Islam

Thus, “Babylon” appears to function as a dynamic, cumulative symbol, rather than as a label for a singular historical opponent of Jesus’ followers. Pagan Rome alone is an incomplete fulfillment of the prophecy. The Pagan Empire committed no infidelity by political, cultural or commercial relationships with other kingdoms. And certainly the Pagan Rome could not intoxicate all the nations of the world. When the Church dared to enter into idolatry, following the path of Israel,¹² and aligned herself with Rome in her political ambitions, she became one with the mystical Babylon (cf. 1Cor 6:16). Critical voices in the Middle Ages pointed out that the great courtesan in John’s vision represented the Catholic Church.¹³ As it is known, this interpretation became popular in modern times, since the Reformation.¹⁴

Since mystical Babylon is a dynamic and cumulative identity, she must include every Abrahamic religion deviating from the word of God, including every ancient, medieval, and modern anti-Gospel heresy, from apostate Judaism and Gnosticism, to Islam, New Age and neopaganism. Among these, Islam is a worldwide religion whose history of mixing politics with religious intolerance is especially prominent.

Traditionally, Islam was not associated with mystical Babylon, likely because of its historical opposition to Christendom. But Babylon is not merely a linguistic confusion; it signifies also disunity. There is no real unity even within the so-called Christian camp; so why should we expect unity between the apostate Christendom and other religious bodies, if the king of Babylon is Lucifer himself (Is 14:4, 12),¹⁵ not merely a human Caesar or Pontiff?

¹² See Lev 20:22-23; Ezek 11:12; Rom 11:19-22; 1Cor 10:11-12.

¹³ Froom, L. E. (*Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. I, Washington D.C., Review and Herald Publishing Association © 1950, 1978: 763-769), documented such interpretation in the writings of Pierre Jean d’Olivi (1285, 1297), a French Franciscan who led the Spiritual Movement. Practically all medieval “haeresies” shared the understanding that the mystical Babylon of Revelation is the Catholic hierarchy. When we say “Catholic”, we mean the whole Church of the Roman Empire, including the Eastern Orthodox schism – not only its main, Roman-Catholic, branch. See also Dante Alighieri, *Divina Comedia*, Inferno, Canto XIX, strophe 36-39. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1001/1001-h/1001-h.htm>

¹⁴ Wikipedia, “Whore of Babylon”, the subheading “Reformation view” indicates Reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox as supporters of this view.

¹⁵ This is an old Christian interpretation, promoted by Church Fathers, beginning with Tertulian (*Against Marcion*, Bk. V, ch. Xviii, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951], Vol. III, p. 466). Jerome translated the Hebrew word הַיֵּל (hay-LEHL “morning

Including Apostate Protestantism

Even the Protestant denominations that follow in the steps of Pagan, Jewish, Catholic or cultic manifestations of Babylon became Babylon, or daughters of Babylon, the same family. Adventist pioneers, beginning with the summer of 1844, declared that the American churches—embracing slavery, politics, spirit of persecution, worldliness, infidel criticism of the Bible, and opposing the Second Advent message—had also become Babylon and should therefore be abandoned. Additional sins entered the Protestant churches after 1844: spiritualism, false pentecostalism, instant mystical holiness, Christian Zionism, ecumenism, increasing sexual sins etc.¹⁶ Even the Adventist denominations that abandoned the belief in Jesus' soon coming, rejected the message of the seventh-day Sabbath and clung to the spiritualist theology have been declared Babylon.¹⁷

Thus, Babylon is made up of “various organizations” (GC 603.2), and the complete establishment of Babylon is in the near future. There are still Christian movements that, theologically at least, keep the faith of their ancestors, the medieval saints. When all the churches “will corrupt themselves by idolatrous devotion to the service of the Papacy” (Lt232-1899.20-22), we will see what organization exactly will make up Babylon.

The precise identity of Lady Babylon will be manifest when “all the corrupt powers that have apostatized from allegiance to the law of Jehovah” “will be united, in opposition to God's people.” (Ms 24, 1891.17). Only when the most deceiving miracles will be acted to support the universal cult of Revelation 13, when “the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete. The change is a progressive one, and the perfect fulfillment of Revelation 14:8 is yet future.” (GC 389.3) “The existing confusion of conflicting creeds and sects is fitly

star”) of Is 14:12 into Latin as “Lucifer” (light-bearer). The hybistic self-exaltation of “Lucifer” in the satirical dirge of Isaiah is difficult to refer to any contemporary king of Babylon (Assyrian or Chaldean). But it is significant that supreme gods of various nations bore the title “king”. Therefore, it is preferable any exegesis that applies or extends the prophecy to the rebellious cherub mentioned in Ezek 28:12-14, as “king” of Tyre. Actually, the supreme god of Tyre was called [Melqart](#) (“King of the City”).

¹⁶ See White, Ellen, *The Great Controversy*, ed. 1911, Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho, 2019, pp. 382-384. www.egwwritings.org

¹⁷ Ellen White, *Early Writings*, 123-125; *The Early Years: 1827-1862* (vol. 1), 287.9. www.egwwritings.org

represented by the term ‘Babylon’, which prophecy (Rev 14:8; 18:2) applies to the world-loving churches of the last days.” (PP 124.1)

Babylon’s Intoxicating Wine

Our pioneers, including Ellen White, interpreted the gold chalice in the hand of the great harlot, full of the hot wine of Babylon’s infidelity, to be doctrinal errors, “such as the natural immortality of the soul, the eternal torment of the wicked, the denial of the pre-existence of Christ [...], the advocating and exalting of the first day of the week above God’s holy, sanctified day. These and kindred errors are presented to the world by the various churches.” It is a wine of wrath, because the false doctrines anger people against “all who will not come into harmony [...]” with them. (Lt 57, 1893.10).

Babylon’s Three Sectors

The name Babylon (Ak. *Babilu*, Heb. *Babel*), was originally meant the “Gate of God”, but the Bible author and the ancient Versions¹⁸ deliberately interpreted it as “babble”, “confusion”, “mixture” — and by extension: “embroilment”, “tumult”, “division”, “amalgamation” etc. The linguistic and social division at Babel was preceded by a hubristic religio-political enterprise to build the first postdiluvian city and the first skyscraper-temple. Three lineages, descendants of the sons of Noah — the Semites, the Hamites, and the Japhetites — united in undertaking this project.¹⁹ In a similar way, the earthly triad of apocalyptic powers (Rev 13:2, 4, 11-14; 16:13) constitutes the end-time Babylon, which is

¹⁸ Gen 11:9. Heb. *balal* (mix, confuse), cf. Clines, David, ed. *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009. Middle Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic and Syriac: *balal*, *balbel* (mix up, stirr, disarrange, upset, disturb), cf. Jastrow, Marcus, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature*, The Judaica Press, New York, 1996:171. Aramaic: *balal*, *balbel* (to mix), cf. [Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon \(online\)](#). Ak. *balalu* (to mix, brew beer, make an alloy, knead; be spotted, variegated, confuse, pollute, be numb, mingle), according to Oppenheim, A. Leo (ed.), *The Assyrian Dictionary*, volume 2 (B), Oriental Institute of Chicago, Illinois 1965:39. LXX translated Heb. *Babel* in Gen 11:9 as σύγχυσις *sunchusis* (disorderly mob reaction: confusion, tumult, uproar) from the verb συγχέω *suncheō* (pour together, mingle, confuse, commingle, confound, trouble, disturb, frustrate, stir up, cause dismay, bewilder), according to the lexicons included in BibleWorks 10.

¹⁹ Gen 10:1, 25, 32; 11:1, 8. While Semitic peoples (Assyrians, Syrians, Chaldeans, Arabian, Hebrews etc.) spoke or speak languages derived from Proto-Semitic, there was at least one branch, the Elamites—descendants of Elam (Gen 10:22; Is 11:11), the first son of Shem — speaking an isolate language, completely different from the surrounding tongues. For any Bible believer, this is an indication that some descendants of Shem joined the Babel builders.

characterized by its tower of accumulated sin (Rev 18:5). Lastly, when the earthquake of the seventh bowl destroys their work, the sinful city splits into its three constituent parts, before receiving its final blow (Rev 16: 18-21).

The three constituent parts of Babylon have been identified by Uriah Smith to be “Paganism, Catholicism, and backslidden Protestantism,”²⁰ while Ellen White interpreted them as “Papists, Protestants, and worldlings” (Maranatha 190.2, 4): “Papists, Protestants, and worldlings will alike see in this union a grand movement for the conversion of the world” (HF 359.4). Here “worldlings” seem to represent modern forms of paganism, such as spiritism, spiritualism, theosophy, pantheism (DA 258.2; Ev 591.4; ST May 9, 1906, par. 6; 13MR 1.3; BCL 109.6), the Emmanuel movement,²¹ Christian Science, Oriental mysticism, healing by magnetism, energies, sympathetic remedies, mind cure (Ev 606.1-2), clairvoyants, fortunetellers (2MCP 699.4).

The presence of ecumenical²² and interfaith movements demonstrates that a universal religious alliance is indeed possible. The growing admiration of large Protestant communities toward the Papacy; the dialogue with Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions initiated by the Papacy; the foundation of certain interfaith congregations,²³ — all these indicate that the final form of Babylon is ready to make its appearance. The New Age spiritualist movement is particularly designed to draw under its umbrella every kind of spirituality in its relativistic, postmodern maelstrom.²⁴

²⁰ Smith, Uriah. *Thoughts on the Book of Daniel and the Revelation*, Battle Creek, Mich.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1882:742.

²¹ The movement was initiated by the congregationalist pastors Elwood Worcester and Samuel McComb, together with the physician Isador Coriat, at the Emanuel Church of Boston, and lasted 23 years (1906-1929). It promoted a mixture of religious, psychologic and parapsychologic technics and therapies (including suggestion and hypnose), to treat some mental disorders, alcoholism, depressions, etc. The movement was criticised by both physicians and theologians. (See Wikipedia, “Emmanuel Movement”).

²² The *World’s Council of Churches*: <https://www.oikoumene.org/> ; Wikipedia, “Ecumenism”.

²³ See *Parliament of the World’s Religions* (founded in 1893, Chicago; resumed in 1993), gathers Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Baha’i, aborigines. <https://parliamentofreligions.org/> ; *United Religions Initiative (URI)*, founded in 2000, for interfaith cooperation, cf. Wikipedia, “United Religious Initiative”; *Chrislam*, founded in Nigeria, cf. Wikipedia, “Chrislam”; *Living Interfaith*, founded by a reformed Jew, includes people from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Taoist, Baha’i, Pagan, Humanist, and New Age religious traditions, cf. Wikipedia, “Living Interfaith”.

²⁴ “Theologically, the New Age typically accepts a holistic form of divinity that pervades the universe, including human beings themselves, leading to a strong emphasis on the spiritual authority of the self. This is accompanied by a common belief in a variety of semi-divine non-human entities such as angels, with whom

Thus, corresponding to the apocalyptic anti-trinity of religio-political powers—the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet—Babylon is ultimately composed of three religious families: non-Christian, Catholic, and Protestant.²⁵

The Beast with Seven Heads

General observations and parallels

Heaven's inspired strategy of revealing the future through emblematic images involves two hermeneutical aspects. On the one hand, each symbol is limited in its capacity to express the complexity of reality; on the other hand, Revelation also employs composite symbols, in order to convey more fully the complexity of history and its spiritual implications. Yet symbols are usually static, graphic emblems, whereas reality is always dynamic. Therefore, the apocalyptic symbols, whether simple or composite, are at once complex and limited. The multi-headed beasts in the Revelation of John particularly illustrate this characteristic.

As we have seen, the religious coalition against God is alternatively and symbolically described as a city (Babylon), or as an infidel woman. Likewise, the political-economic support of this coalition is described as “many waters”, which is the large waterway, Euphrates (Rev 17:1, cf. 9:14; 16:12), or “peoples, crowds, nations and languages” (v. 15), or a “scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, with seven heads and ten horns” (v. 3).

This beast apparently differs from the dragon of chapter 12 and from the sea beast of chapter 13, since it is scarlet and bears no crowns at all. However, the differences among these three beasts may lie in their role, status, hypostasis, and emphasis, rather than in their essential identity.

humans can communicate, particularly by channeling through a human intermediary. Typically viewing history as divided into spiritual ages, a common New Age belief posits a forgotten age of great technological advancement and spiritual wisdom that declined into periods of increasing violence and spiritual degeneracy, which will now be remedied by the emergence of an Age of Aquarius, from which the milieu gets its name. There is also a strong focus on healing, particularly using forms of alternative medicine, and an emphasis on unifying science with spirituality.” (Wikipedia, “New Age”).

²⁵ This is a simplification. To be more exact, non-Christians religions include Judaism, Islam and every post-Christian spirituality. Catholicism includes Old Catholics, Eastern-Orthodox, and other sacramentarian churches heirs of the Roman Empire's official Church; Protestantism includes all denominations confessing Sola Scriptura, but cling to traditional or specious errors, while opposing the three angel's message.

The dragon, the sea beast and the scarlet beast represent essentially the same reality: the demonic forces operating through world powers against God's people. The dragon bears crowns on its seven heads, highlighting historical and contemporary paganism, including the pagan elements within apostate Christendom (cf. 12:15). As it is described as the power cast from heaven and opposing Michael, the angels and God's people, it clearly represents Satan's confederacy.

The sea beast of Revelation 13 represents the same demonic reality, but with emphasis on one of the seven heads. It bears ten crowns—one upon each of the ten horns of its dominant head—thus underscoring the Christianized Roman Empire with its ten horns in Daniel's vision (7:7-8, 19-25). This same head in Revelation 13 is most probably the beast that was wounded and then revived.

The scarlet beast bears no crown at all, since its apparent sovereign majesty is embodied in Queen Babylon. While the sea beast has blasphemous names inscribed on its heads, the scarlet beast is completely covered with such names (17:3), suggesting the climactic stage of Satan's work. Its scarlet color, easily associated with the red dragon of chapter 12 — as well as its special period of activity (during an eighth epoch, after the seven "kings") —, points directly to Satan himself.

The Scarlet Beast: The Eighth and One of the Seven Kings

The angel's cryptic description of the beast that "was, and is not, and will appear again" (v. 8 b) sounds like a parody of God and Christ, "He who is, and who was, and who is to come" (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8). In addition, the angel specifies: "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend from the Abyss and go to destruction." (v. 8a). Such an experience in the Book of Revelation is destined for Satan himself: he is now in control of the whole world (1 Jn 5:19), then he will be bound and cast into the Abyss, and finally released from it, before going to his ultimate destruction (Rev 20:1-3, 7, 10).

The scarlet beast's identification with Satan himself is well established in Adventist theological circles.²⁶ Moreover, the angel specifies that the beast itself — the eighth king — is also one of the seven (Rev 17:11). The same formula (“was, is not, and will appear”) applies to the principal head of the beast, with its ten horns, according to the parallel statement in Rev 13:3: “One of its heads seemed to have been slain to death, yet its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled and followed the beast”. In this framework, the beast may be said to “have been” during the 42 months (v. 5), and to “be not” during the age of secularism — the interval between the French Revolution and the restoration of the global cult foreseen in Revelation 13, when the beast's mortal wound will be healed. Finally, at the Second Advent of Christ, the beast “will go to destruction” (Dan 7:11; Rev 19:20).²⁷

A Religious and Political Confederacy

The image of the woman allied with the beast is unique in Biblical apocalyptic literature. It was only in rebellion against God's command that the woman befriended the Serpent. Yet God promised eternal enmity between Woman and Serpent (Gen 3:15). In Revelation 12, that enmity is vividly portrayed between the virtuous Woman and the Old Serpent, who by then had become a ferocious, seven-headed dragon. In Revelation 17, however, a sinful alliance is depicted between a woman — God's most beautiful creation in Genesis — and an unnatural, dragon-like beast, whose heads and horns symbolize her illegitimate lovers: the kings of the earth.

As the woman represents institutionalized religion, and the heads, horns, and kings represent the political realm, the meaning of this dangerous combination is evident: it portrays not only a general spiritual confusion between the community of believers and the world, but especially the totalitarian religio-political system that characterized all ancient states and was later appropriated by the Church from the 4th century onward. This ferocious system is symbolized by all the beasts in Daniel and Revelation. Yet in Revelation

²⁶ See Mueller, Ekkehard, “The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion (Part I),” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10, N° 1 (2007), pp. 38–40; www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org Lehmann, Richard, *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, Faculté Adventiste de Théologie, Collonges-sous-Saleve, France (2018), pp. 454–459.

²⁷ See also Stefanović, Ranko, “The Seven Heads of The Beast in Revelation 17”, *Ministry*, December 2013. www.ministrymagazine.org

17, the two elements—religion and politics—are depicted separately, the woman “and” the beast, in order to highlight the deadly consequences of their alliance and to illustrate how the woman (organized religion) will ultimately be punished, when the very political powers she once deceived turn angrily against her.

This first apocalyptic prophecy in Daniel 2—the very ABC of prophecy—warns about precisely this problem: the final phase of world history is characterized by an untenable political alloy, iron mixed with clay. The Roman Iron Empire is first internally divided into two distinct elements: the statecraft of iron and the churchcraft of clay, that is, baked clay.²⁸ This unsound alloy also constitutes the ten toes, or kingdoms, representing all Christian states in Europe and their former colonies. Ellen White echoed this long-standing Protestant interpretation when she stated:

“We have come to a time when God’s sacred work is represented by the feet of the image in which the iron was mixed with the miry clay. [...] The mingling of church craft and state craft is represented by the iron and the clay. This union is weakening all the power of the churches. This investing the church with the power of the state will bring evil results. Men have almost passed the point of God’s forbearance. They have invested their strength in politics and have united with the papacy. But the time will come when God will punish those who have made void His law, and their evil work will recoil upon themselves.”²⁹

A contemporary trend that signals the final constitution of Babylon—symbolized by the seven mountains, heads, or kings—is the recent resurgence of the Christian right in historically Christian nations, even in the most secular states of Europe and in today’s United States. The idea that iron-fisted politics might better serve Christianity’s mission in the world—or simply bring back the good old days—is spreading everywhere, from Eastern Orthodox Russia to freedom-loving America. The dream of a purified Christian state, upheld by iron rule, is so deeply rooted in many churches that, with striking irony, some

²⁸ The Aramaic term *ḥasaph* in Daniel 2:33, 42, 45 means “ceramic”, “terra cotta”, thus suggesting that it was forged with iron. Cf. Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT* (Hol9562), pg 406 (included in BibleWorks 10): *ḥṣṣ*, det. *ḥṣṣ*: *formed clay* (i.e. some object of pottery, whether potsherd or tile); *ḥasaph di phéḥar* “potter’s work” (2:41); *ḥasaph ṭinā* “earthenware” (2:41-43).

²⁹ Ms 63, April 22, 1899, 12, 13; Let 57, 1896; 1MR 51.1; 4SDABC 1168-1169.
<https://text.egwwritings.org/read/61.274>

have even embraced the label “The Seven Mountain Mandate,” as if deliberately seeking to fulfill Revelation 17.³⁰

The Beast’s Heads as Symbols of Mountain-Kings

Concerning the meaning of the seven heads of the beast, the angel explains it to John: “the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while.” (Rev 17:9-10 NRSV).

The significance of the seven heads was well understood and explained by various scholars. “Kings” are not referred in the apocalyptic prophecy as individuals, but as representatives of kingdoms.³¹ Likewise, mountains symbolize kingdoms.³² If one insists on literal mountains or literal kings, such a view does not require a special “wisdom” (Rev 17:9a). Thus, the seven mountain-kings represent political powers, not individuals. Since the ten horns symbolize secondary or derivative political powers, the seven heads—or mountain-kingdoms—must represent the principal world powers, seen from heavenly perspective.

As the angel explains, the seven mountain-kingdoms, though represented by static symbols (the seven heads) in John’s vision, are interpreted dynamically: five of them had already fallen by John’s time, the sixth was then present, and the seventh would appear only for a short while before the end. This provides a clue: the sixth mountain kingdom was Rome.³³ Therefore, the five that had fallen must be identified with the five great powers that

³⁰ See Wikipedia, articles: “Seven Mountain Mandate”; “Dominion Theology”; “Christian right”; “Moral Majority”; “Christianity and Politics”.

³¹ In the political succession of the world’s five ages in Daniel 2, the first is designated a “king,” while the following are described as “kingdoms,” (vv. 38–40; 7:17). Similarly, the four horns of the goat in Daniel 8 are called “kingdoms,” whereas the smaller horn in verse 9 is referred to as a “king” (vv. 22–23). Yet, this “king,” though arising in the Hellenistic period, is said to endure until the time of the end (vv. 17, 19), which makes it clear that it cannot be an individual ruler.

³² See Ps 68:15–16, where Israel, God’s mountain, is envied by other mountains (cf. Is 29:8). According to Jer 51:25, Babylon is portrayed as a “destroying mountain”. In Ezek 35:2-5 the kingdom of Edom is called “Mount Seir”. In Dan 2:35, 44, God’s kingdom is symbolized by a mountain that fills the whole earth.

³³ Jean Vuilleumier (*Apocalipsul*, Editura Expansion-Armonia, București, 1996, p. 259, Romanian translation) counts the seven kingdoms beginning with Babylon, as in the prophecies of Daniel. Yet, unlike Daniel, the Revelation of John extends its perspective into the remotest past (see chapter 12). Moreover, any similar model is forced to divide Rome into three different kingdoms: Pagan (classical) Rome, Papal Medieval Rome

proved to be hostile to God's people: (1) Pharaonic Egypt, (2) the Neo-Assyrian Empire, (3) the Neo-Babylonian Empire, (4) the Medo-Persian Empire, and (5) the Hellenistic Empire of Alexander and his successors.³⁴

The Ten-Horned Roman Head

John does not specify the place of the ten horns. Was he deliberately keeping a secret? Did he regard their place as unimportant? Did he see them all in one place, perhaps placed on the beast's back? Or were they distributed unequally among the seven heads, as often shown in artistic depictions? Rather, John seems to assume that any careful Bible student would know this detail: they all belong to the Roman head, as revealed in the vision of Daniel 7.

The attribution of the ten horns to the sixth head—namely, the Roman head—is a crucial observation that appears to have been overlooked in the past. The sixth mountain-king, present in John's own time, was the Roman Empire. This empire is portrayed in prophecy as distinct from its predecessors. According to Daniel 7, the Christianized Roman Empire is the final world power, enduring until the time of the end and bearing the ten horns. Through these horns, understood as subsequent or derivative powers, the empire continues to exist in a divided and multiplied form until the end, much like the ten toes of the great statue in Daniel 2. In this way, the Roman Empire persists through its successor powers all the way to the end of history.

and a future Revived Papacy. Such a historical application of prophecy is not convincing, since it departs from the prophetic model of Daniel 7, unnecessarily fragmenting the Roman-Christian continuity.

³⁴ We will not analyze here some interpretations that are outdated or discarded in the Adventist academic circles, such as:

- A. The thesis of the seven successive forms of government in Rome (1. Kings; 2. Consuls; 3. Decemvirs; 4. Dictators; 5. Triumvirs; 6. Emperors; and 7. Popes (cf. Smith, Uriah, *Daniel and the Revelation*, Review and Herald Publishing Company, Battle Creek, Mich. 1904, page 660).
- B. The thesis of the seven popes to be counted since 1929, when the beast was healed, as some believe (Fowler, Franklin S. Jr., *The Final Years of the Papacy: Revelation 17* (Granite Falls, WA: Christian Heritage Foundation, 1999) p. 9). See the analysis of E. Mueller, "Pope Francis, 666, and Time Setting", Biblical Research Institute, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/articles/pope-francis-666-and-time-setting#footnote-5>
- C. Variants of historical critical interpretations, for example: that seven mountains are seven hills of Rome, and seven caesars (such as Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Galba), the seventh one being Nero. The ten horns/kings that do not belong to a specific head, must be the satellite / vassal kings allied with Rome. Cf. Wikipedia, "The Beast (Revelation)".

Daniel 7 presents the ten horns in dynamic sequence, to highlight the rise of the eleventh horn (the Antichrist), which supplants three and thereby becomes the eighth. Beyond this point the vision notes no further action among the horns, though in history the Christianized horns of Rome multiplied and spread across the world.

To identify exactly ten Western European nations today is impossible, for they are no longer eight, ten, or eleven, but many more. In addition, the Christian Empire was not confined to the West; it also encompassed the Eastern part, and over time Northern and Eastern nations were conquered by Christianity and grafted into the Christian world. Later, many of these countries established overseas colonies, so that today the former Christian Empire continues to exist through its multiplied “horns.” In Daniel 2 and the Book of Revelation, the number ten — especially when applied to toes or horn-powers — should be understood as a symbolic number, signifying multiplicity.

Thus, the ten horns of the scarlet beast represent the totality of political powers whose roots trace back to the Roman Empire through Christian Europe. These states still display features of their Christian heritage, including a persistent nostalgia for unity and the dream of a renewed world order. In other words, they are still Rome, although divided.³⁵

This unitary understanding of the Roman and Christian world development is not only the inspired, prophetic perspective, but it is a thesis embraced by some historians.³⁶

“There is no parallel to this survival in all the history of mankind. Every other great civilization has, after many centuries of development, either fallen into a fixed and sterile sameness or died and disappeared. There is nothing left of Egypt, there is nothing left of Assyria. The Eastern civilizations remain, but remain immovable; or if they change can only vulgarly copy external models. But the civilization of Europe--the civilization, that is, of Rome and of the Empire--had a third fortune differing both from death and from sterility: it survived to a resurrection. [...] And the agency, I repeat, which effected this conservation of the seeds, was the Catholic Church.”³⁷

³⁵ It is still used the proverb: *Roma cambia per rimanere la stessa* (“Rome changes to remain itself”). Cf. Tinta Hispana, “Roma Errante”, Visita guiada con Julio Ocampo, 2020 (online article www.tintahispana.it) retrieved 12.10.2025.

³⁶ Freedman, Paul H. (Professor of History), “After the ‘Fall’: The Transformation of the Roman Empire”, lecture at Yale University, 09.19.2011, online on [Brewminate: A Bold Blend of News and Ideas](https://brewminate.com/the-transformation-a-k-a-fall-of-the-roman-empire/) Jan 10, 2017. <https://brewminate.com/the-transformation-a-k-a-fall-of-the-roman-empire/> : „The world of the late Roman historians is divided, roughly speaking, between catastrophists and continuists.”

³⁷ Belloc, Hilaire, “Europe and the Faith - III: What was the ‘Fall’ of the Roman Empire?”, <https://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/bvy.htm>. Wikipedia: “Hilaire Belloc”; “Mr. Belloc Objects to ‘The Outline of History’”.

“To neglect the truth that the Roman Empire with its institutions and its spirit was the sole origin of European civilization; to forget or to diminish the truth that the Empire accepted in its maturity a certain religion; to conceal the fact that this religion was not a mood but a determinate and highly organized corporation; to exaggerate the insignificant barbaric influences which came from outside the Empire and did nothing to modify its spirit; to pretend that the Empire or its religion have at any time ceased to be... all these pretensions are part of one historical falsehood.”³⁸

“Parallel to the development of the Roman Empire in the first century of our era, up to the height it reached under Trajan, there arose... a new power, that of a new Church, whose leaders, by adopting the Roman imperial administrative organization, succeeded in creating [...] a spiritual empire which expanded throughout the Mediterranean world and then across the entire globe. [...] The Church eventually became a supranational institution, a political force equal to or even greater than the existing political powers, [...] until it embraced the whole Roman Empire and then surpassed its borders, giving it universal dimensions, just as it had been in the spirit and desire of all the emperors of the world.”

“The new spiritual empire of the Christian Church, under the leadership of the popes, succeeded in maintaining and keeping united, on an ecclesiastical level, the entire former Roman Empire.”³⁹

The so called barbarians did not enter the Roman Empire primarily as conquerors, but rather as military recruits, allies, or refugees.⁴⁰ Most of them were already Arian Christians, and almost all later embraced Catholic Christianity.⁴¹ In most cases, they settled in the Empire with the consent of Rome or the Official Church. Biologically and linguistically they were gradually absorbed into late Latin society, and alongside their own customs, they adopted late Roman law. The following table summarizes this process, tracing their steps of integration: conversion to Christianity, settlement within the Empire, official acceptance or accommodation, and ultimately conversion to Catholicism of the first ten barbarian polities:

³⁸ See Mulloy, John J., “Hillaire Belloc’s View of History”, in *Catholicism*, quoting Belloc <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/hillaire-bellocs-view-of-history-10689>

³⁹ Drăgan, Iosif Constantin, *Mileniul imperial al Daciei*, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, București, 1985, pp. 240-241 (Romanian language)

⁴⁰ Freedman, Paul H. *op. cit.* <https://brewminate.com/the-transformation-a-k-a-fall-of-the-roman-empire>

⁴¹ Haydock Catholic Bible Commentary, on Bible Hub, identified the ten horns with the barbarian kings that have invaded the Roman Empire; but it noted only their anti-Catholic (Pagan or Arian) phase. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/haydock/revelation/17.htm>)

Barbarian political entities	Converted	Settled	Accepted	Catholics
Burgundians	400-417	443 Savoy	443	517
Suebi & Vandals (Hedding)	466	409, 418 Gallacia	418-561	561
Visigoths	348-376	376, Gaul and Spain	418, 475	589
Vandals (Slingi) & Alans	400+	429-439, N Africa & M islands	435*, 442*	
Alemanni (various tribes)	500+	306, 496 Alsace, Swabia	357, 370-380	600+
Franks (Salians)	500+	418 Gaul	481	496-508
Heruli & Rugi & Thuringi & Sori	400+	c. 400 Italy, Dalmatia	470-476 Obaber	
Ostrogoths	454	454 Italy, Dalmatia	469, 489-493	
Angles & Saxons & Jutes	597+	410+441-491, England	Nt	597+
Lombards	400+	488, Noricum, Italy	568	590-700

The Romano-Barbarian kingdoms, together with those subsequently established in the North and the East, came to shape what we call medieval Europe — the historical matrix of Christian civilization. In my interpretation, these constitute the “ten horns” of Revelation in the present age. Though still divided by religious, political, and economic conflicts, they will ultimately reach a unified consensus, surrendering their authority and power to the beast itself (Rev 17:13), that is to Satan, who will manifest himself as the eighth king.

Thus, the sixth world power—the Christianized Roman Empire—is the chief and longest-lived head of the beast. It endures until the brief rise of the seventh (Rev 17:10), even outlasting it, for it is most probably the very power with which the eighth king — Satan, the beast itself — is identified (verse 11, compare with 13). The head bearing the ten horns must represent both the Roman Empire and its Christian developments. Apocalyptic prophecy is like a cartoon, filled with visual sarcasm. Today’s Christendom is envisioned as the direct continuation of the greatest and most ferocious empire: Rome.

The seventh kingdom

A number of modern scholars, including contemporary Adventist interpreters, generally follow the above historical-interpretive model of the seven mountain-kingdoms, beginning with ancient Pharaonic Egypt. The sixth one is usually identified as Pagan Rome, and the seventh as either the Antichrist or a revived Roman Empire (headed by Antichrist), or the Papacy.⁴² The main differences appear with the seventh kingdom, that some identifies with Papacy, others identify it with the future kingdom of Antichrist.

⁴² See Stefanović, Ranko (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, Mich. 2002) p. 512 (online); Mueller, Ekkehardt (“The Beast of Revelation 17 – A Suggestion”, [Biblical Research Institute](#), article online). Dorneles, Vanderlei (“[The Eight Empire: New Hypotheses for the Symbols of Revelation 17](#)”,

As emphasized above, in prophecy Rome and Christendom represent a single head, rather than two. We cannot divide the historical Rome into two distinct “empires”, one Pagan and one Christian (Papal), although this remains a respectable view in our publications.⁴³ However, the seventh mountain kingdom had to remain for a short time compared to the previous kingdoms, especially particularly the sixth. This is in harmony with our arguments above, that the sixth one is the longest-lived mountain kingdom, as it continues to exist within the ten horn-kingdoms to the end.

What is the most likely candidate to represent the seventh (last) head of the beast, or the seventh mountain kingdom? We have seen that the Papacy and all Christian powers belong to the sixth head with its ten horns, as shown in Revelation 13. Could it be the earthly beast – the False Prophet? Yet the pseudo-prophetic beast belongs to the same false-Christian order, paying homage to the Roman Antichrist beast (Rev. 13:12, 14-17). It stands distinct from the seven-headed beast in John’s vision, so it can hardly be regarded as the seventh head of that beast. The False Prophet appears as a distinct power alongside the sea beast in chapter 13 for didactic purposes, since it was necessary to show how the wound of the sea beast would be healed.

Should we then conjecture about a future global Islamic order — *Dar-al-Islam* — or about another new world order led by China? We have no Biblical basis, nor even decisive evidence, that these contemporary threatening powers serve as more than catalyst agents in preparing the stage for the ultimate fulfillment of prophecy, where other actors may dominate the future political scene.

The only other apocalyptic power that remained undiscussed so far is described in Revelation 11:3, 7 as a “beast” emerging from the Abyss at the end of the 1,260 days—that is, in the time of the end, and thus destined to remain for a short period. This power has consistently been interpreted within Adventist circles as the anti-Christian regime that began with the French Revolution. We can trace its subsequent spread throughout both

Andrews University Seminary Student Journal, vol 1, No 2 Fall, Article 4, 2015) p. 23 (online). Lewis, Daniel J., *Interpreting the Apocalypse of John*, Diakonos, Troy, Mich., 2001, p. 29. (online); Walvoord, John F. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966., 251-54; See also Hengstenberg, Auberlen, Alford, Ellicott on [Bible Hub](#) (online).

⁴³ See note 27.

Christian and pagan nations in diverse forms of secularism, materialism, and non-Christian humanistic ideologies, ranging from the most brutal Communist regimes to the mildest neo-Marxist tendencies of our day.

The Nazi phenomenon must also be included, since it was essentially anti-Church, neo-pagan and racially evolutionist. On the other hand, if the secular and leftist regimes still function as liberal and benevolent democracies—probably the best that human society has been able to devise in this world—let us not forget the heavenly perspective on the Empire of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes: their dominion, though beneficial to the Jews, was nevertheless represented as a beast—a carnivorous bear (Dan. 7:5), or as a heavy charging ram (Dan. 8:3-7, 20).

We may test the suitability of the anti-Christian regime as the seventh mountain kingdom, using the same criteria applied to the preceding six kingdoms.

1. Each successive empire that arose after the Pharaonic Empire was hostile to God's people and also fought against the preceding world power. Assyria was hostile to Egypt (Isa 20:1–6). Babylon defeated and replaced the Assyrian Empire. The Medo-Persian Empire knocked down and absorbed the Babylonian Empire. The Greek (Macedonian) Empire overthrew the Persian Empire and took its place. Rome in turn conquered all the Hellenistic states one by one. In the same way, the modern anti-God and anti-Christ order has struck down and replaced the Roman-Christian order.
2. Since it is the seventh and final kingdom, this power must represent the full development of evil. It is estimated that the victims of the Communist and Nazi regimes together accounted for 60-120 million human lives in just a few decades, compared to the victims of the Roman Empire and Christian Europe, which probably numbered 40-60 million over 1800 years.⁴⁴ However, if we also consider the spiritual assassinations and mutilations caused by the modern and contemporary anti-Christian philosophies, we must acknowledge that the so

⁴⁴ There are no complete, detailed and consensual studies on this issue. My estimation is a superficial research with the help of ChatGPT.

called “scientific” ideologies of the last generations have destroyed forever many more millions of souls than any form of paganism or false Christianity ever did.

3. This last mountain-kingdom is not a unitary empire like Egypt or Babylon, but rather a world order and a zeitgeist controlling multiple states, some more or less allied, and others even in conflict. This phenomenon may be compared to the separate Hellenistic kingdoms or the multiple Christian states. The apocalyptic visions emphasize the progressive divisibility of the successive seven “kingdoms”: the fourth (Medo-Persia) was a twofold empire (Dan. 8:20); the fifth (the Hellenistic world) was fourfold (Dan. 7:6; 8:22); and the sixth (the Roman-Christian world) is tenfold (Dan. 7:7, 20, 24; Rev 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 12). Thus, in this progressive line, it is no wonder that we may now count countless countries and governments.
4. Regarding the timing of this world order, which delivered a heavy political, cultural, and spiritual blow to the old Christian regime, we may consider the French Revolution, including the abolition of the Papal States (1793–1798), as its beginning. This order drastically declined with the fall of Communism in Europe, and it will apparently come to an end either when the present tendencies toward Christian-right restoration in Europe and the U.S.A. succeed in reestablishing a revived Christian order, according to Revelation 13, or—if we follow the logic of this prophecy—when the eighth king, Satan, manifests himself and delivers its fatal blow. It is described as a short time, likely in comparison to the long-lasting rule of the sixth kingdom, throughout the Christian era.

The eighth king that is one of the seven

The interpreting angel told John that the blasphemous scarlet beast is itself an eighth king (Rev. 17:11a) – not an eighth head, or an eighth mountain-kingdom, for the beast has only seven heads. Period. Yet the beast itself will finally manifest as an eighth king, arising after the seventh mountain-kingdom. As we have stated, this beast-king is Satan himself,⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See footnote 26.

not a new world order that would be different from the preceding regimes, represented by the sixth (Roman-Christian) and the seventh (anti-Christian) head-kingdoms. However, the angel continues his enigmatic explanation: “the beast.... is itself also an eighth* and is of the seven*” (τὸ θηρίον καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν, v. 11b). The expressions “an eighth” and “of the seven” in this elliptical sentence clearly refer to *kings*, since the Greek masculine ordinal adjective ὄγδοός agrees grammatically with βασιλεῖς (kings) in verse 10, its anaphoric antecedent.

The Bible has no explicit prophecy to indicate that Satan will ever appear himself visible on the religio-political stage. It only indicates that by his agents he will prove able to unexpected miracles (Mt. 24:24; 2Thes. 2:9-12; Rev 13:12-17), and may disguise himself as an angel of light (2Cor. 11:14). If there is a Biblical prophecy about Satan to be disguised as the Son of God and making his visible advent in our world, it is this revelation through John: the scarlet beast itself, the power controlling the world powers will make his visible appearance as the ultimate star of the political realm. How probable and how realistic is it this scenario? Generally, Biblical prophecies do not predict predictable events. Each world empire of Daniel 7 could not be foreseen at that time, a generation before it came on the stage.

Satan has shown himself to Christ in the wilderness, to deceive and challenge Him, in order to win Him over to his side (Mt. 4:1-12). Surely, the devil manifested himself as angel of light, not as he is popularly depicted as a dark, horned being, or as some artists portrayed him: as a snake, or a lurid shadow. The temptation of Christ remained the prototype of the highest temptation in monastic circles, as recounted about Antony the Great, whether his experience had a real basis, a hallucination or legendary embellishment, it was interpreted in the Middle Ages, as though the devil appeared to him in the guise of Christ.⁴⁶ Monastic sources even suggest that, in the end times, the archenemy will take the

⁴⁶ Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, cap. 65. NPNF (V2-04), 0295-0373, p. 496, § 40 (online). See also: Guy, Jean-Claude (ed.), *Les Apophtegmes des Pères: Collection systématique*, vol. 1 (*Les Sentences d'Antoine*), Sources Chrétiennes 387, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993, p. 152; Krivochéine, Basile (ed.), “Syméon le Nouveau Théologien”, in *Catéchèses*, Sources Chrétiennes 96, 33, §2, Paris: Cerf, 1963, pp. 346–347; *Patericul Egiptean*, „Avva Antonie cel Mare”, Romanian edition, București: IBMBOR, 2005, p. 24; *Philokalia ton hieron niptikon*, vol. I, Venetia, 1782, p. 47 (footnote in the chapter „Despre amăgiri demonice”; *Dobrotoliubie*, Moskva, 1793, vol. 1, p. 59–60; *Patericul Egiptean*, ms. slavon Lavra Peșterilor din Kiev, f. 216v (sec. XII).

appearance of Christ to deceive the very elect, just as Antony's temptation served as a prophetic icon of the last deception.⁴⁷

The known ancient handbook called *The Didache* (2nd cent. AD) is probably the first Christian writing that warns of this false Parousia that must take place just before Christ's Second Advent:

"For in the last days false prophets and seducers shall be multiplied, [...] 16:4 and because iniquity aboundeth they shall hate each other, and persecute each other, and deliver each other up; and then shall the Deceiver of the world (ο κοσμοπλανης, cf. Rev. 12:9) appear as the Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands; and he shall do unlawful things, such as have never happened since the beginning of the world [...]; then shall the world behold the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven."⁴⁸

Whether this warning was a reminiscent of information from the apostolic age, or an extracanonical prophecy,⁴⁹ it agrees with Ellen White's prophecy about Satan impersonating Christ, before the Second Advent:

"As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation [1:13-15]. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: 'Christ has come! Christ has come!' The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth. His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. He declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels sent to them with light and truth. This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion.

"But the people of God will not be misled. The teachings of this false Christ are not in accordance with the Scriptures. His blessing is pronounced upon the worshipers of the beast

⁴⁷ See Nicodim Aghioritul, Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν νηπτικῶν, τόμος Α', Βενετία, 1782, p. 47 (nota marginală la cap. Περί πλάνης τῶν δαιμόνων). *Filocalia*, 1782, p. 47 (Romanian editions). "Just as he once tried to deceive Anthony, appearing to him in the form of Christ — for this is the type of the final delusion." (τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἐσχάτης πλάνης).

⁴⁸ *The Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, in [Early Christian Writings \(online library\)](#), Chapter 16, vv. 16, 3a, 4, 8.

⁴⁹ The quoted writing suggests, that in those times the prophetic gift was likely present, or at least claimed by some (Did. 10:7; 11:3-12).

and his image, the very class upon whom the Bible declares that God's unmingled wrath shall be poured out."⁵⁰

"He will come personating Jesus Christ, working mighty miracles; and men will fall down and worship him as Jesus Christ. We shall be commanded to worship this being, whom the world will glorify as Christ. What shall we do? [...] Satan is determined to keep up the warfare to the end. Coming as an angel of light, claiming to be the Christ, he will deceive the world. But his triumph will be short."⁵¹

"One effort more, and then Satan's last device is employed. He hears the unceasing cry for Christ to come, for Christ to deliver them. This last strategy is to personate Christ, and make them think their prayers are answered."

"In this age antichrist will appear as the true Christ, and then the law of God will be fully made void in the nations of our world. Rebellion against God's holy law will be fully ripe. But the true leader of all this rebellion is Satan clothed as an angel of light. Men will be deceived and will exalt him to the place of God, and deify him. But Omnipotence will interpose, and to the apostate churches that unite in the exaltation of Satan, the sentence will go forth [Rev. 18:8]."

"Satan will not only appear as a human being, but he will personate Jesus Christ, and the world that has rejected the truth will receive him as the Lord of lords and King of kings."⁵²

"Christ will be personified, but on one point there will be a marked distinction. Satan will turn the people from the law of God. [...] Crowned heads, presidents, rulers in high places, will bow to his false theories."⁵³

This bewildering scenario represents the greatest Satanic deception, and carries profound apocalyptic implications. It suggests that Christendom will acknowledge Him as the true religious and political *Lord God* of this world, and that all nations will be converted to this popular form of Christianity — that is, all those who reject the final warning (Rev. 18:1-5; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9-12). This event will thus inaugurate the long-expected millennial kingdom of "Christ", together with his religio-political worldwide church, Babylon. Consequently, this scenario sheds new light on the enigmatic statement of the angel, who declares that "the beast itself, which is an eighth, ... is also one of the seven".⁵⁴ Which one of

⁵⁰ White, Ellen G. *The Great Controversy*, 1911, pp. 624.2 – 625.1 © Ellen G. White Estate, 2025 <https://legacy.egwwritings.org>

⁵¹ White, Ellen G., *Maranatha*, (compilation), Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. 1976, p. 206.5-8. <https://legacy.egwwritings.org>

⁵² White, Ellen G., *Manuscript 16*, 1884; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 1893, p. 62; *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary* 5:1105, 1106 (1900); *Last Day Events* 165.1; 168.2-3. <https://legacy.egwwritings.org>

⁵³ White, Ellen G., *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, (compilation) 1923, p. 471.3.

⁵⁴ The Greek text lacks the cardinal adjectiv εἷς ("one") which would normally be expected in such constructions (cf. 1Ch. 11:15; Tobit 12:15; 4Macc. 14:4 LXX; John 6:71; 20:24; Rev. 6:1; 17:1; 21:9). However, this elliptical formula (ἐκ τῶν ἑπτά) or similar expressions, are sometimes used in the same sense; cf. Acts 21:8 (Philip is ἐκ τῶν ἑπτά); 2Sam. 23:19, 23 (LXX), where Abishai and Benaiah are said to be ἐκ τῶν τριῶν). While the major English Versions are divided on the rendering of Rev 17:11 — NRSV, NIV and

the seven? Certainly the same power that has traditionally presented itself as Christ's earthly kingdom — that is, the Roman-Christian head.

Probably this is not such a difficult riddle. Five of the seven kingdoms have long since fallen. Thus we have only two kingdoms with which the false Christ could identify himself: the Roman-Christian mountain-kingdom and the last, Anti-Christian mountain-kingdom. Both are his own domain, both manifested often his evil character and his policies. Yet, while the seventh one is the perfection of evil developed in atheism, he obviously preferred throughout the Christian Era, to corrupt Christianity, rather than to encourage atheism or a new form of Paganism. By working this way, he caused both a paganized Christendom and a practically atheistic world.

Revelation 13 suggests that the ten-horned and ten-crowned head is "the" beast, and probably the same head was mortally wounded and later was healed. In Revelation 17 the role of the "ten kings" for the same reason is emphasized. Thus Satan as a visible false Christ is an eighth world power, that never was seen in this world; but at the same time he is one of the seven, namely the sixth one, on whose behalf he comes, to represent it visibly, to invest it with all his reserves of power and glory, so that his consensual plan with the ten kingdoms — the pseudo Christian states — may succeed, until God's plan is fulfilled (Rev. 17:12-13).

The light-bearing impostor will be unmasked during the seven plagues, especially when the kingdom of the beast (the whole world) will be enveloped in the deepest supernatural darkness (Rev. 16:10). This fact explains why the Euphrates — the waters of the civil powers on which Babylon sits — begins to dry (Rev. 16:12), and why the triple alliance of evil in Rev. 16:13-16 makes its final, superhuman effort to annihilate the people of God who have taken refuge on the "Mount of Elijah" (Har-Megiddo).

Yet this action is the last breath of Babylon, for the direct intervention of God brings the final judgment on Babylon (Rev. 16:17-21). This closing scene of Revelation 16 is the counterpart of the final scene of Revelation 17, where Lady Babylon is punished by her former lovers — the "ten kings" who now rise against her. With the rising of the false Christ,

NIRV read "it belongs to the seven," while NET and NJB have "is one of the seven" — the context clearly favors the partitive sense of the preposition ἐκ, and thus the meaning "one of the seven (kings)".

the ten kings of the Roman Christendom will encompass all the world powers. But the plagues will awaken them to see that they have been deceived by Lady Babylon and her false God-Messiah.

Conclusion

Our study of Revelation 17 largely corroborates the interpretive framework already present within Adventist theology. Our primary contribution lies in the nuanced analysis of the last two heads of the beast, as well as in elucidating the place and identity of the ten horns. We have sought to underscore the unity of the sixth head with the ten horns — representing the worldwide Christian powers — while highlighting the distinctly anti-Christian character of the seventh head of the beast. It is our hope that these reflections may offer valuable insight to other interpreters engaging with this complex prophetic vision.