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THE EIGHTH EMPIRE: NEW HYPOTHESES FOR THE SYMBOLS OF REVELATION 17

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Abstract

This article analyzes the prophetic symbols of Rev 17 with the purpose of exploring the relations among the scarlet beast, the first beast of Rev 13 and the dragon of Rev 12. The parallel among the three symbols is used as a basis to suggest a relation between the restored leopard-like beast and the harlot, and between the two-horned beast and the scarlet beast in his eighth king phase. The study is done in light of the Old Testament (OT) context in which the symbols of the dragon and beasts, used by John, are related to political powers that persecuted Israel. The eighth king is distinguished from religious power and related to a specific political power in the end times.

Keywords: Book of Revelation, Revelation 17, prophetic interpretation, Apocalypse, prophecy, New Testament studies.

Introduction

Revelation 17 is one of the most challenging and fascinating sections of Revelation. One of the angels who have the seven bowls of God's wrath (Rev 16) calls the prophet to a new sequence of visions, which follows the narrative of the plagues. The angel starts by announcing, "I will show you the judgment of the great harlot" (Rev 17:1).

The harlot's identity is less discussed than the identities of the beast and his heads. One current interpretation is that the beast is the same entity represented by the dragon of Rev 12 and the beast of Rev 13: the Roman Empire, whose capital was considered the "city of seven hills," as suggested by Rev 17:9. In this perspective, the seven kings of Rev 17:10 would be seven Roman emperors.¹

¹About dating the book of Revelation in A.D. 95 based on the notion that the seven kings are seven Roman emperors, see Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 435-437; Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 158-159; and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).

Mounce states that John's readers of the first century would have no doubt in understanding this reference to anything other than Rome, the city built on seven hills.² This preterist interpretation is embraced by a "majority of exegetes,"³ but denies the prophetic gift in the visions narrated in Revelation.

Another line of interpretation sees the scarlet beast as a symbol of the world powers and the eighth king as a return of the seventh one, that is, papal Rome. In this case, the phrase "eighth king" indicates that the entity is in its final phase of existence, after the restoration of its powers removed by the French Revolution in 1798.⁴

A third interpretation relates the scarlet beast (Rev 17) to the red dragon (Rev 12) and reads them as referring to Satan himself in his last fight against God and His people.⁵ Another alternative view suggests that the eighth king is also the scarlet beast and represents a "worldwide confederacy of civil and secular power" in opposition to God in the end times.⁶

A more popular interpretation, less grounded theologically, sees the scarlet beast as papal Rome and holds that the creation of the Vatican City State, in 1929, by the Lateran Treaty corresponds to the healing of the beast's mortal wound in Rev 13. In this view, the seven kings represented by the heads of the beast are seven popes,

²Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 313, 314.

³Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 12:554. Johnson believes the "interpretation of this chapter [17] controls the interpretation of the whole book of Revelation" (*ibid.*, 553).

⁴See Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 515, 516; Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 7:854-856.

⁵See Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Beast of Revelation 17: A Suggestion [Part 1]," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10, no. 1 (2007): 45. Osborne considers that the eighth king of Rev 17:11 is "the Antichrist himself, that is killed and then raised from the dead in another 'great imitation' of Christ" in the last time. According to him, "the Antichrist will assume power and take upon himself divine attributes but is the absolute opposite of divinity" (on Rev 13). See Osborne, *Revelation*, 513, 615. Beale understands that, in the eighth king phase, "the beast appears temporally to defeat the entire church community in the end time". However, "his victory will be short-lived", and "he will soon thereafter go to destruction." The "threefold formula corresponds to the career of Satan in 20:1-10, so that both refer to the same events from the vantage point respectively of the beast and of Satan." See G. K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 364. However, this perspective ignores that the beast and kings are destroyed by Christ's manifestation, before the millennium (Rev 19:20), and Satan is killed after the millennium (Rev 10).

⁶Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 136, 212, 218; see Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:851.

and the eighth will be a last pope who maintains certain relations with his predecessor.⁷

The diversity of interpretations reflects the complexity of the vision. One of the challenges is that many apocalyptic symbols are described as “beasts” (Rev 11:7; 13:1, 11; 17:3). The Greek word *thērion* (“beast”) occurs 38 times in Revelation, and it is always translated as “beast.”

Interpretations that identify the scarlet beast with the first beast of Rev 13:1 or with papal Rome face a clear problem. In Rev 17:16, the scarlet beast and the ten kings “hate” and destroy the harlot (Roman religious power).⁸ The relation between the scarlet beast and Satan seems to take out the beast from the immediate context of the seven plagues and ignore the meaning of the verb “sit” (*kathemai*, in Rev 17:3, 9; 18:7) which indicates that the woman exercise control over the beast. “The “confederacy” of secular powers,⁹ instead of the scarlet beast, may represent the coalition formed by the beast and the “kings of the earth” (Rev 16:14; 17:12-14). Thus, a more clear definition of the entity represented by the symbol is required.

This article intends to explore the evidences for the following hypotheses: (1) the scarlet beast and the harlot represent distinct entities that are religious and political respectively; (2) the eighth king represents a concrete historical and political entity at the eschatological climax; and (3) the eighth king may be the same as the two-horned beast described in Rev 13:11.

Revelation is a book of the New Testament (NT), but it is rooted in the imagery and languages of the OT. Thus, one must search for its main symbols in the Hebrew Scripture.¹⁰

⁷Patricia Ann Sunday says that “the Lateran Treaty proclaimed Pius XI as the first holy Roman Empire’s Catholic king/pope,” and “he literally became king of the Vatican State” in February 11, 1929, and the successor of Benedict XVI will be the eighth and last pope. See Patricia Ann Sunday, *Nostradamus, Branham and the Little Book: God’s Masterpiece* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2012), 300). Barho and Mbeledogu say that since Pius XI was the “first monarch of the Vatican,” Benedict XVI was the seventh king/pope, and the eighth will “not be human” and his reign will endure only seven years. See Onoso Barho and Obi Mbeledogu, *The Eighth King is Here* (Dartford, UK: Xlibris Corporation, 2012); cf. Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 215, 216).

⁸In Rev 17:16 KJV, ignores the Greek particle *kai* (“and”) between the ten horns and the beast which is translated by NIV and NAS.

⁹Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 212.

¹⁰Paulien argues that “Revelation cannot be understood without continual reference to the OT,” as it is a “perfect mosaic of the passages from the OT.” The recurring references to the OT in the book of Revelation indicate that it is the main key to “decode” the message of Revelation. See Jon Paulien, “Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 1:80.

The Vision

Revelation 17 is composed of three parts: a speech from the angel (v. 1, 2), a vision of the symbols (vv. 3-6), and another speech from the angel (vv. 7-18). The vision is clearly symbolic. But the two speeches should be considered explanations of the vision and are therefore, literal and temporal in the sense that they reveal the symbols and occur in the time and circumstances of the prophet.¹¹ The angel uses the past tense when speaking of the harlot and her sins. With her, “the kings of the earth *committed* fornication” and “the inhabitants of the earth *were* made drunk” (v. 2). This fornication or prostitution indicates idolatry (see Eze 16, 23; Jer 51).

In the second speech, the angel uses verbs in the three fundamental tenses when referring to the identity of the beast.¹² He says that five of the seven kings “have fallen,” “one is,” and another “has not yet come” (v. 10). He also says that the “ten kings” have not yet received their kingdom, but will receive it (v. 12). He adds that the ten kings and the beast “will make war” against the Lamb (v. 14) and “will hate” the harlot (v. 16).¹³

The vision of Rev 17 is part of the set of visions concerning the seven plagues (Rev 15:5-18:24), which starts with a scene of the heavenly sanctuary in which the end of the mediation is indicated (Rev 15:5-8). Thus the context shows God’s judgment on those who bear the “mark of the beast” (16:2; cf. 14:9, 10) and the harlot (Rev 17:18). Divine vengeance on the “beast,” “false prophet,” and “dragon” comes later (Rev 19:20, 21; 20:10). Paulien says Rev 17 may be considered an “exegesis of Revelation 16:12-16”¹⁴ and should be read as a unit.

Identity of the Beast

In its structural aspects, the beast of Rev 17 relates to the red dragon (12:3) and the beast of Rev 13. However, the scarlet beast should not be identified as Satan, since animals, beasts, and horns represent secular political powers, not spiritual entities (see Dan 7:17, 24; 8:20, 21).

¹¹Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 214, 215.

¹²Within the prophecies, the consistent use of future tense in explanations by angels and others supports the claim that every explanation is given “in the time of the prophet.” See Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 214, 215; cf. Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor Publ., 1979), 54. The use of verb tenses in Daniel provides a basis for this principle (see Dan 2:31-35, 36-44; 7:1-15, 16-27; 8:3-12, 13-14, 19-25; 9:25-27). Except when he identifies the symbols as the represented entities (“those great beasts, which are four, are four kings,” Dan 7:17), he uses the future tense consistently (“which shall arise out of the earth,” Dan 7:17).

¹³The harlot of Rev 17 echoes the OT figure of Jezebel. They both practice prostitution (2 Kgs 9:22; Rev 17:2, 4, 5), shed the blood of saints and prophets (2 Kgs 9:7; Rev 17:6; 18:20, 24), and have their flesh consumed (1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:36; Rev 17:16).

¹⁴Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 208.

John uses the Greek word *thērion* (“beast”) 38 times, the most of them to the beasts with seven heads and ten horns. He also uses the Greek nouns *drakōn*, “dragon” (13 times), and *ophis*, “snake” (four times), interchangeably in reference to Satan. The use of these words and metaphors in the OT may suggest what would have been in John’s mind when he used those terms to describe the animals shown to him as symbols. Because the dragon of Rev 12 and the beasts of Rev 13:1 and 17 all have a consistent seven heads and ten horns, they may be viewed as a single symbol that is reconfigured each time it appears. Therefore, in the three visions the structure is the same, but details change according to the context of each vision.

The noun *thērion* is used in the OT Greek version to translate the Hebrew *chay*, which refers to animals and beasts in general (see Gen 1:24; Ps 49:10). However, the word is also used in a metaphorical sense. Ezekiel says that, in captivity, the sheep of Israel were “scattered” and became “food for the *beasts* of the field” (Eze 34:5, NKJV). Predicting the restoration, the prophet says that God would bring them together “from the countries” (v. 13) and destroy the “wild beasts” (v. 25). Then God guarantees: “And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of *those who enslaved them*. And they shall no longer be a prey for the *nations*, nor shall *beasts* of the land devour them” (v. 27, 28, italics added). In these verses, the Hebrew word used is the singular *chay*, “beast,” but it is rendered in plural by the Greek text, as *thēria*.

Thus, Ezekiel refers to the nations that enslaved Israel with the metaphor of the “beast.” The end of captivity, when God would break the “yoke” of bondage, would result in the destruction of the “beast.” Isaiah also prophesies the end of captivity with parallel language: “In that day the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt... Shinar [Babylon]” (Isa 11:11, 12; cf. Micah 7:12).

In these parallel prophecies, the beast is a metaphor for Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, the enemies who enslaved the covenant people. The Hebrew *chay* (Gr. *thērion*) is also used for the beasts of Daniel 7. Thus, the OT provides a background for the figure of the beast described by John and provides the identity of the first possible powers referred by the angel, as the ones that have passed in John’s time.

Dragons and serpents also are common in the OT as symbols of forces opposing God. Interestingly, the OT relates the dragon to Egypt and Babylon, two empires presumably represented by heads of the beast (Rev 17).¹⁵ In the *proto-gospel*, the Son of the woman crushed the head of the “serpent,” from Heb. *nachash* (*ophis*, LXX, Gen 3:15). In the Exodus, God crushed the head of a *tannin* (*drakōn*, LXX, Ps 74:13, 14; Isa 51:9; see Eze 29:3; 32:2), which is translated as “dragon,” “sea

¹⁵The LXX uses the Gr. noun *drakōn* 30 times to translate the Heb. *tannin*, “dragon,” “serpent,” or “sea monster,” and the Heb. *livyathan*, “dragon,” “leviathan,” or “sea monster.” *Ophis* is used 29 times to translate the Heb. *nachash*, “serpent” or “snake,” and the Heb. *ephēh*, “viper” or “snake.”

monster,” and “serpent.” Babylon is called a *tannyin* (*drakōn*, LXX) that crushed Judah, but that would be destroyed by the Lord (Jer 51:34, 36, 37). In the day of the Lord, He will permanently crush the *tannyin* (*drakōn*, LXX) and *livyathan* (*drakōn*, LXX), as well as the snake, which is *nachash* (*ophis*, in LXX, Isa 27:1; Isa 11:11 specifically mentions Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon [“Shinar”] as powers to be destroyed in the day of the Lord). In Revelation, Christ defeats the kings and the beast in the second coming (Rev 19:19, 20), or in the OT day of the Lord. Thus, the symbols of the dragon and beast are related to persecutors and political powers.

Alan F. Johnson embraces this reading by saying that Leviathan, Rahab, and dragon (serpent) in the OT refer to “political powers, such as Egypt and Assyria, that were threatening Israel”.¹⁶ Robert H. Mounce also says Leviathan, or “marine monster”, in Ps 74:13, “is Egypt”, and in Isa 27:1, the same figure corresponds to “Assyria and Babylon”.¹⁷

Thus, the figure described by John in Rev 12, 13, and 17 as a dragon or a beast may be a reproduction of the *tannin* or *livyathan* (the seven-headed monster of Canaanite mythology which represented the forces of evil)¹⁸ and the *ophis* of the OT. This would be consistent with the idea that the book of Revelation is rooted in OT language and imagery. If so, the ancient prophets clearly identify three of the entities represented by heads of the monster: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon.¹⁹ In addition, Dan 7 extends this list by using the term “beast” to describe the animals that represents in his visions Babylon, Persia, Greece, and imperial Rome.

If what was in John’s mind is the picture of the OT *chay*, *tannin* or *livyathan* as a representation of satanic forces when he used the Gr. words *drakōn* and *therion* to

¹⁶Johnson, “Revelation,” 525.

¹⁷Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 232.

¹⁸See Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 4:206; Johnson, “Revelation,” 524; Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1942), 107-114; E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 1:278, 279.

¹⁹The interpretation that the “seven mountains” (v. 9) are the seven hills of Rome contradicts the logic that the beast and the harlot represent different entities. The Greek noun *oros* should be translated as “mountains.” The NIV translates it as “hills,” but in this case “a previous exegesis has influenced” the translation (Johnson, “Revelation,” 559). The seven “mountains” should be considered within the Hebrew context, that is, as kingdoms (see Isa 37:32; see also Ps 48:2; Jer 51:25; Dan 2:35, 9:20; Zec 4:7). The same occurs with the term “king,” which OT used as the equivalent of “kingdom” (see Dan 7:17; 8:21, 23). About the relation between the “mountains” and the Roman Church, Johnson still argues that these symbols “belong to the beast [political power], not to Babylon [religious power].” See Johnson, “Revelation,” 560; Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:851. Beale argues that the hills (Gr. *oros*) is figurative, meaning “strength”, rather than literal. “This usage [seven hills] points beyond a literal reference to Rome’s hills to the figurative meaning of kingdoms, especially in the light of Rev 8:8 and 14:1, where mountains figuratively refer to kingdoms” (Beale, *Revelation*, 366).

describe the beasts that he saw, then *drakon* and *therion* would be parallel symbols in Revelation as those OT pictures are as well. And it is possible to say that the same symbol is reconfigured in Rev 12, 13, and 17 according to a new perspective in each vision. In chapter 12, the focus is on the Roman Empire, or the sixth head; in 13, it is the popes' empire, the seventh head;²⁰ and in 17, the focus is on the eschatological climax with the eighth king.

In the three visions shown to John, the power behind the represented entities is Satan, but he is acting against God's people through earthly and historical powers. Thus, the beast and dragon symbolize the satanic power embodied by a persecutor empire, which rises and falls with each new empire.²¹

The fact that the "red dragon" fights against Christ at the time of the Roman Empire (Rev 12:4) and persecutes the church during the papal empire (12:13, 14) and the end times (12:17) suggests that the symbol structure may be the same. In each of these periods, a different head of the monster would be active. In Rev. 13:3 John says that "one of his heads" was "mortally wounded," presumably the seventh one, which becomes active in that period of history.

Thus, the OT clarifies the identity of the first heads of the dragon and the beast by using the Hebrew words *chay* [gr. *therion*], *tannin* and *livyathan* in reference to Egypt and Babylon. It also includes Assyria when it says that God will arise against his people's enemies on the day of the Lord (Isa. 11:11). Since the angel's explanation on Rev 17:10 occurs in the temporal perspective of the prophet—that is, in the first century—five of those earthly powers had passed (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece), one remained (Rome), and the seventh one was yet to come (papal Rome).²² Paulien says that "the image of a seven-headed beast represents a beast that lives, dies, and is resurrected seven or eight times."²³

²⁰The angel's affirmation that the seventh kingdom (papal Rome) would endure a "little" (1,260 years!) can be understood from the perspective of ensuring the victory of God's faithfulness achieved on the cross and not from the viewpoint of chronological time. The adjective "little" (Gr. *oligon*, v. 10) is also used in Revelation to say that the dragon, after the cross, knew that he had a "little time" (*oligon kairon*, 12:12). On the other hand, John says that the dragon will be released after the millennium, but for a "short time," using the Gr. *mikron kronon* (20:3), indicating a measured length of time (see also 1 Pet 1:6, which uses *oligon* to indicate unmeasured time).

²¹This view fits the angel's definition that the beast "was, and is not, and will ascend" (v. 8, 11), which would be a parody of the dragon's claim to be like God, "who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev 1:4, 8, 4:8), the only "I AM" (Exod 3:14).

²²About this list, see Paulien *Armageddon at the Door*, 218; Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:855; Kenneth A. Strand, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?" in *Symposium on Revelation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 2:191.

²³Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 211.

Jacques Doukhan suggests that the local and temporal context of Rev 17 is the “desert” (Gr. *eremos*; 17:3) which would be the period when the pure woman is persecuted during the Middle Ages (see Rev 12:14). In parallel to this point, he argues that “the 10-horned beast [Rev 13:1] covers the historical period announced in the vision of Daniel 7” which would be from Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, until papal Rome.²⁴ From this perspective, he sees the phase indicated by the angel’s words “one is” (Rev 17:10) as the “period of absence”, after the fatal wound on the beast, or the time of the “sixth king,” when according to him, there is a “paradoxical state of this [sixth] king, who ‘exists’ even though he looks as if he is dead.”²⁵

However, this viewpoint ignores the background of the dragon and beasts in the whole OT that indicates Egypt and Assyria as part of the persecutors kings represented by those symbols. Besides that, when the angel talks to the prophet, they are located in prophet’s time. Daniel saw four beasts in the “great sea”, but when he listened to the angel explanation the perspective is his own time (see Dan 7:2, 17). It is important also to realize that John does not use the definitive article before the word *eremos*, in Rev 17:3, which implies he is talking about a new situation or symbol. When he intentionally mention one symbol already referred in his visions he uses a definitive article.

In addition, Beale says that the transportation “in spirit into a desert” alludes to Isa 21:1-2, “where a vision from God is revealed to the prophet Isaiah and is described as coming ‘from the wilderness, from a terrifying land’ (Isa 21:1).” He argues that “this allusion is confirmed by the fact that Isa. 21:1-10 is a vision of judgment against Babylon and by the fact that the phrase ‘fallen, fallen is Babylon’ of Isa 21:9 appears in Rev 18:2.”²⁶ Trafton also points out that, by eliminating the definitive article in Rev 17:3, John indicates “this is ‘a’ wilderness, not ‘the wilderness’.” Thus, “John has borrowed the notion of ‘wilderness’ not from chapter 12 but from Isa 21:1, which speaks of Babylon (17:5) as the ‘wilderness of the sea’.”²⁷

Therefore, the identification of the heads of the dragon and beasts from Egypt until Greece has a solid grounding in the OT, from which the main figures of John’s visions are extracted.

The Eighth King

In Rev 17:11, the angel adds information to the vision by pointing out the emergence of an eighth element: “And the beast . . . is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven” (v. 11).

²⁴Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 163.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Beale, *Revelation*, 355.

²⁷Trafton, *Reading Revelation*, 155.

The text of Rev 17:11 has been translated in different ways depending on the Greek particle *kai*, which precedes the Greek pronoun *autos* (“he”) and the ordinal adjective *ogdoós* (“eighth”). The particle *kai* can signify the conjunction “and,” but is also used as an adverb that may be translated as “also,” “even,” or “equally” (see Matt 5:39f, 46; 12:45f; Mark 8:7; Acts 13:9). The NIV ignores the particle and says, “The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king.” The KJV translates *kai* as “even”: “The beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth.” The NKJV renders it as “also”: “The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth.” The NKJV and KJV translations seem more suited to the context, since the beast or the dragon is the power working in each of the heads or “kings,” including the eighth: the beast is each one of its seven heads and is *also* the eighth. This accords with the background of the seven-headed dragon symbol, which is associated in the OT with Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, political and temporal empires. Interpreting the beast itself as the eighth suggests that it is not each one of its seven heads, but only the eighth. This separates the beast from its own heads, which would be strange given that the symbol is a single unit.

Mounce insists in distinguishing the eighth king from the previous seven. He points out that this element “is an eighth [king] in the sense that he is distinct from the other seven” and he is “of the seven [*ek ton hepta*]” and not “one of the seven.” In this condition, the eighth “plays the same sort of role as his earthly predecessors,” and his period of hegemony “is the great tribulation preceding the return of the Messiah.”²⁸

The absence of the definite article before the adjective masculine ordinal *ogdoós* (“eighth”) does not necessarily favor the idea that this eighth is the beast itself (gr. *thērion*, which is a neutral noun).²⁹ It simply means that this is a new element in the vision.³⁰ Since the adjective *ogdoós* is masculine, it can be related to “kings” (gr. *basileus*, a masculine plural noun). In this case, in the context of the description of

²⁸Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 318. By ignoring this Greek construction, George Eldon Ladd says, “the second and final manifestation of the beast is in an eighth king; but it is not the eighth king for there are only seven; it is an eighth king which is one of the seven.” According to him, this suggests that “one of the seven is to experience two stages of his existence,” and this king would be shortly followed by an eighth, “who is the seventh in his full antichristian manifestation.” See George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 231. In the same view, Bullinger points out that the eighth “is ‘of the seven,’ that is to say, he is the 7th in another (his 8th, or superhuman) form. And though he is ‘an eighth’ king, there are not really eight, but only seven, for the seventh and eighth are the same personage.” See Ethelbert Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation, Or, the Apocalypse* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 542.

²⁹See Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:856.

³⁰When John describes something for the first time, he does that without the definite article (see Rev 12:1, 3, 13:1, 11, 17:3).

the seven kings (v. 10, 11), it would be more natural to see the “eighth” as a historical king/empire than as the beast itself.

The fact that the angel says five kings have fallen, one exists, and the seventh will come (v. 10) suggests a consecutive relation and similarity among the seven kings and the eighth element. Furthermore, the angel adds that the eighth “proceeds” (Gr. *ek*, “origin”) from the seven, suggesting that an eighth empire is predicted to follow the seventh one. The beast itself can’t “proceed” from the seven empires.

If the beast is “*also* an eighth,” it should be concluded that he is each one of the empires represented by his seven heads.³¹ In this case, he represents the imperial powers or “political agencies” that have opposed God throughout history.³² Each of these world empires, the moment it becomes a persecutor of God’s people, can be seen as the embodiment of Satan’s rule in the world.³³ Thus, “every head of the beast is a partial incarnation of satanic power that governs the world for a period.”³⁴ God may also use empires to support the remnant, as happened to Egypt and Persia. But, for all of them, there is a crucial moment in which they act to benefit the dragon’s cause: this is when a head rises up.

Parallel Visions

By interpreting Revelation, one must take into account the distinctive feature of apocalyptic prophecy that is the description of parallel, complementary, and

³¹Another unified symbol representing several empires as one unique element can be seen in Dan 2: the statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar whose elements (gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay) are destroyed by the stone that falls from the sky, suggesting that the empires pass, but the power behind them remains until the arrival of the kingdom of Christ, when it shall be completely destroyed.

³²“The beast in itself may be identified with the work of Satan through political agencies, at all the times, which submit to his control.” See Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:851; cf. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 515).

³³Each of the seven empires challenged God in some way. Pharaoh asked Moses, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?” (Exod 5:2). The Assyrian king Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem and challenged the Lord, stating that Yahweh could not deliver Judah from his hands (2 Kgs 18:13, 30-35). Nebuchadnezzar threatened the Jews, saying, “Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” (Dan 3:15). In Persia, Haman wanted to exterminate the Jews (Esther 3:8). The Seleucid Antiochus killed Jews and desecrated the temple. Rome crucified Christ and destroyed Jerusalem. About papal Rome, it be would asked, “Who is like the beast?” (Rev 13:4). In turn, the two-horned beast causes the earth and its inhabitants to worship the first beast (13:12) and condemns to death those who do not do it (13:15).

³⁴Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 292.

interdependent visions.³⁵ William Johnsson says that parallel visions “recapitulate and expand the subject matter already given,” adding “details not present in the previous account”.³⁶ In the case of Daniel, chapters 2, 7 and 8 describe the same powers by using different pictures and approaches. Ekkehardt Mueller states that both Daniel and Revelation use the “principle of recapitulation,” by which different visions “cover basically the same historical period but each from a different perspective and with different emphases.”³⁷

LaRondelle states that the seven heads and ten horns of the symbolic monsters of Revelation establish distinct parallels among those views. He observes that three times (Rev 12, 13, and 17) “a symbolic beast” with seven heads and ten horns is displayed.³⁸ “This beast [Rev 17] also has the significant feature of the seven heads and ten horns (v. 3), closely related to the red dragon of chapter 12.”³⁹

When Rev 12, 13, and 17 are placed in parallel, for the entities represented by the dragon and the beasts, we have the following configuration:

Revelation 12: The dragon pursues the pure woman and Christ (v. 4); in this case he represents imperial Rome. However, he also pursues the woman for 1,260 years (12:6, 14); thus he also represents papal Rome. Finally, he still pursues the remnant, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (12:17); thus, he also represents the same entity portrayed by the two-horned beast (13:15-17). But he has seven crowns in his heads (Rev 12:3), which point to seven political powers. In this way, the old ones are represented in this vision.

Revelation 13: The leopard-like beast gets the throne from the dragon (13:2), that is, he succeeds imperial Rome and persecutes the saints for 1,260 years (or 42 months, 13:5); thus, he represents papal Rome. In turn, his ally, the two-horned beast emerges from the “earth” (13:11), the same place where the pure woman went out after the 1,260 years of persecution (12:16). Thus, this earth beast represents a political power in the New World, where a group of faithful Christians took refuge in the early 17th century. The earth beast pursues those who do not have the mark of the beast and, therefore, keep the commandments of God. In doing that, he

³⁵See William Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 799; Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:110, 111, 123, 788, 818.

³⁶Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic,” 799.

³⁷Ekkehardt Mueller and Gernard Pfandl, “How do Seventh-day Adventists Interpret Daniel and Revelation,” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Hagerstown, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 87.

³⁸Hans K. LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, book 2, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 177.

³⁹Hans K. LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, book 2, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 376.

represents the same entity already portrayed in the dragon's actions against the remnant (12:17).⁴⁰

Revelation 17: The scarlet beast has seven heads that are seven kings (vv. 9-10). The angel says that five of them had fallen (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece) and one existed in John's time, that is, imperial Rome. Besides that, the seventh one would come, that is, papal Rome. However, the beast is also an eighth (v. 8), an ultimate power of the same nature of the previous seven, on which the harlot would be mounted in the final crisis. Being the last temporal power to support the harlot, this eighth king can represent the same power in war against the remnant that was first portrayed by the dragon in Rev 12:17 and the two-horned beast (13:11), which restores and supports the first beast in the final crisis.

In this viewpoint, the "mystery" (Rev 17:7) of the beast that has seven heads that are seven/eighth sequential kings in war against God's people is already suggested in Rev 12 and 13. The parallel among those kings would be as follow (see **Table 1**):

	<i>Imperial Rome</i>	<i>Papal Rome</i>	<i>A Last Empire</i>
Rev 12: Dragon	v. 4 Crucifies Christ	vv. 6, 13, 14 Persecutes the church for 1,260 years	v. 17 Persecutes the remnant
Rev 13: Beast + 2nd Beast	v. 2 Occupies the same throne of the dragon	vv. 2, 5 Persecutes the church 1,260 years	vv. 11-18 Persecutes those who don't have the mark of the beast
Rev 17: Beast + 8th king	v. 10 Existed in John's time	v. 10 King that would come in future	v. 11 Persecutes the elect and faithful

Besides this above parallel that makes important suggestions about the identity of the kings, the relation of the harlot's judgment to the sixth plague sheds additional light on Rev 17 by allowing a wider exploration of the entities symbolized by the woman and the scarlet beast. During this plague, the world appears completely polarized between the enemies of God and the remnant. The enemies

⁴⁰It is clear that keeping the commandments is the reason for the persecution by the two beasts against the saints in Rev 13 by the verbal parallel between Rev 13:10, "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints", and 14:12, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

are the coalition of religious powers represented by the dragon, beast, and false prophet (Rev 16:13) and the political and military powers represented by the “kings of the earth” (16:14). At Armageddon, the remnant consists of whom “watches and keeps” to walk uprightly before God (16:15).

Those two groups are represented several times in Revelation, but most clearly at the final crisis described in Rev 13 and 16–17. In chapter 13, the enemy group is represented by two symbols: the first beast, healed of his deadly wound, and the two-horned beast (see 13:11-17). In Rev 17, the same group is represented by two other symbols: the harlot and the scarlet beast along with the “ten kings.” From chapter 13 to 16 and 17, there is a change in which the entity represented by the first beast becomes a religious power and expands to incorporate “Spiritualism” and “Protestantism,”⁴¹ as suggested in Rev 16:13, in order to become Babylon (17:5). In turn, the two-horned beast goes forth to incorporate “the kings of the earth” (16:14; 17:12, 16). This expansion in the description of the entities justifies the change in the symbols.⁴² Therefore, the beast whose mortal wound was healed (religious power; in Rev 13:12) would be parallel to the harlot in Rev 17, and the two-horned beast (political power; in Rev 13:11) would be parallel to the eighth king.

Thus, considering the common context of the final crisis in Rev 12–13 and Armageddon in Rev 16–17, where the enemies of God assume this political and religious configuration, these visions may be put in parallel. The first beast represents the same entity as the harlot, and the two-horned beast represents the same entity as the eighth king, as following (see **Table 2**):

Table 2: Parallels Between the Religious and Political Powers of Revelation 13–17		
	<i>Religious Powers</i>	<i>Political Powers</i>
Rev 13:11–17:8 Final Crisis	Restored first beast	Two-horned beast & the Earth and its inhabitants
Rev 16:12-16 Armageddon	Dragon, beast, and false prophet	Kings of the earth
Rev 17:12-15 The Last Battle	Harlot	Scarlet beast: Eighth king & ten kings

⁴¹See Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 160-165, 173; cf. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 588, 589.

⁴²Such changes to symbols are common in apocalyptic prophecy when the spectrum of the revelation is expanded or changed. In Dan 2, a sequence of empires (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and papal Rome) is represented by a statue of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. The same sequence of empires is represented in Dan 7 by four beasts. In Dan 8, the symbols change again and the last three powers are represented by a ram, a goat, and a “little horn.”

The apocalyptic symbols seem to be used in a consistent way to represent religious forces and political and military powers: animals or beasts represent secular powers, and animals with human characteristics or persons represent religious powers. In Dan 7, the animals that represent the political powers of Babylon, Persia, and Greece do not have human characteristics, but the little horn of the fourth beast, which represents the political-religious power of the popes, has “eyes like the eyes of a man” and “a mouth speaking” (Dan 7:8). In Revelation, the beast symbolizing papal Rome has a mouth that speaks “blasphemy against God” (Rev 13:6). The second beast, symbolizing American political power, has no human characteristics. In Rev 17, a woman represents the religious power, but the scarlet beast that displays nothing human represents the political and military powers. Thus, as a symbol, the beast represents a religious power only in the historical period alluded in Rev 13:1-10, when the same entity incorporates both religious and political powers.

The parallels between the visions in Rev 13 and 16–17 allow to expand the relation between the eighth king and the two-horned beast. The scarlet beast “carries” (17:7; Gr. *bastazōō*, “take”, “bear”) the harlot, who is “sitting” on him (v. 3). The two-horned beast makes an image of the first beast and restores his wound (Rev 13:14): that is, the second beast places himself in the service of the first one. The scarlet beast, which is also the eighth king (17:11), leads the “ten kings” (modern nations; multifold peoples) against the Lamb at the final battle (17:14). The two-horned beast leads those who “dwell on the earth” (13:14) and the “kings of the earth” (16:14) against God and His people at Armageddon. Thus, both scenarios predict a “grand coalition” of secular powers, to be led by the two-horned beast according to Rev 13, and by the scarlet beast in the eighth king phase according to Rev 17.

On the other hand, the climax of the conflict described in Rev 13:11-17 would not be possible without the role performed by the two-horned beast. He restores the power of the first beast, makes an image of him, and imposes his laws over the earth. If the final crisis is started by the emergence of the two-horned beast in Rev 13, he really should be seen in the scenario of the final crisis described in Rev 17.

The angel further states that the scarlet beast (political and military power), supported by the ten kings, destroys the harlot (religious power; Rev 17:16). At the eschatological climax, the final proclamation of the Three Angels’ Messages (Rev 14:6-10) by the remnant will unmask the harlot and contribute to her subsequent fall during the sixth plague. The “waters” that “dry up” (see 17:15; 16:12) point to the withdrawal of the support of the nations (13:14; 16:14; 17:12, 13). Thus, the nations that previously united in favor of Babylon not only cease to support her, but hate and destroy her (17:16).⁴³ Among the nations seduced by the harlot, the strongest is the one represented by the two-horned beast.

⁴³The wrath of God upon the harlot will be executed through her own allies, which are

It should also be noted that the description of a seven-headed beast plus an eighth king in Rev 17 allows an even clearer parallel with Rev 13, where John also describes eight elements: a seven-headed beast plus a two-horned beast. Considering the essential role of the two-horned beast in the final crisis, it makes sense that he should be mentioned in Rev 17, which focuses on the end times. Since that entity is not represented by one of the seven heads of the first beast in Rev 13, it also makes sense that in Rev 17 this power is represented as an *eighth*, or an addendum to the sequence of the previous seven, distinguished from them.

On the other hand, what will make the United States a persecuting power in the final crisis is the fact that this nation will reproduce a characteristic of the beast's seventh head, which is the only earthly power formed by the union of church and state. Thus, when the United States formalizes a union of the (Protestant) church with the (Republican) state, it will have reproduced the "image of the beast" (Rev 13:14) in this Protestant nation.⁴⁴ After that, this beast begins to "speak" like a dragon, by acquiring a human characteristic.

Although Stefanovic interprets the eighth king as the resurgence of medieval political power of the papacy in the end times, he sees the two-horned beast of Rev 13 as the key power in the final crisis. He says, "What the second half of Rev 13 seems to suggest is that the medieval authority of the first beast once again will be exercised [but] through the earth beast." He adds, "The earth beast will even replace the first beast in universal power and authority and will act as the end-time worldwide oppressive power."⁴⁵ In the final crisis, "the earth beast comes to exercise the same intolerance and force that characterized the sea beast during the Middle Ages".⁴⁶ Thus, in Stefanovic's perspective, the political power to act in the final crisis like the medieval papacy is that one represented by the two-horned beast of Rev 13, resting no other choice unless seeing the two-horned beast as a parallel power to the eighth king which is the oppressive power in the final crisis according to Rev 17.

In this viewpoint, the power of the United States in the final crisis can be adequately described as a successor of the seventh head or a resurrection of the beast. The eighth will not be a distinct one from the seventh head of the beast but an offshoot of him. This relation between the eighth king and the seventh one can justify the expression that the eighth "is of the seven" or "proceeds" from them

also enemies of God. God used ancient Babylon to execute His judgment upon Judah (2 Kgs 24:1-20; Jer 20:4), and Persia to get revenge on Babylon (Isa 13:19, 34:14).

⁴⁴Ellen White explains that the union of church and state will lead the United States to form an image of the beast. "When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy." See White, *The Great Controversy*, 445.

⁴⁵Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 423.

⁴⁶Ibid., 424.

(Rev 17:11, KJV. Curiously, John describes the two-horned beast as an *allon thērion* of the first one, that is, other beast of the same nature (Rev 13:11).

Finally, John says that the entity represented by the two-horned beast “exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast” (Rev 13:12). Thus, cooperation between the two supposed last kings was already established in Rev 13. This union is represented in Rev 13 by the cooperation between the two-horned beast and the first beast, and in Rev 17 by the woman (church) who seat on the beast (state).

Conclusions

The visions related in Rev 17 and 18 can be seen as further explanatory revelations about the sixth plague and the fall of the mystical Babylon. There is a sequence of judgment (Rev 17) followed by execution of sentence (Rev. 18). The harlot and the scarlet beast seem to represent different entities within the group of God’s enemies at the eschatological climax.

Since the heads of the scarlet beast of Rev 17 represent seven kings/world temporal empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and papal Rome), the eighth may be the American imperial power, as represented by the two-horned beast in Rev 13:11. In this case, the “eighth king” would be the last empire to exercise power over God’s people.⁴⁷

This relation between the eighth king and the two-horned beast does not discard the relation between the eighth king and Satan, but it seeks to specify how and through whom the dragon shall act at the final crisis. This hypothesis is consistent with the way Scripture identifies the kings/empires with the dragon symbol. In Exodus, Egypt is the *drakōn* that God crushed on the waters (LXX, Ps 74:13, 14; Isa 51:9; Eze 29:3; 32:2). Babylon is the *drakōn* that crushed Israel (LXX, Jer 51:34). Pagan Rome is represented by the figure of the *drakōn* (Rev 12:3, 9). Papal Rome receives the power and throne of the *drakōn* (Rev 13:2), and the two-horned beast speaks like the *drakōn* (Rev 13:11).

This hypothesis is also consistent with the context of Rev 17. John says that the beast and his aliens (ten horns) will hate the harlot and destroy her (v. 16).⁴⁸ If the

⁴⁷About the development of the Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of Rev 13:11, see Uriah Smith, *The United States in the Light of Prophecy; or, An Exposition of Rev. xiii, 11-17* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1876); L. A. Smith, *The United States in Prophecy* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1914). See also Vanderlei Dorneles, *The Last Empire* (Tatuí, SP: CPB, 2015), 33-52.

⁴⁸The reading “and the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot” (NKJV) is not consistent with the context because vv. 12, 13 say that the ten kings have no power without the beast. They exercise their role with and through the beast. Thus the reading “beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute” (NIV) is more clear in the light of the previous description about the relationship among the kings and the beast.

beast and the ten horns/kings are seen as the political powers that are deceived by the religious power in the end time, it would be coherent with the preview that the beast and the ten kings will destroy the religious power that deceived them. This would be the effect of the sixth plague which is being explained in Rev 17 and 18.⁴⁹

The structural similarities among the scarlet beast, the red dragon, and the leopard-like beast suggest that Satan is the power behind all the empires that have opposed God and His people. The parallels among the visions of the eschatological climax described in Rev 12, 13, 16 and 17 favor the comparison between the first beast and the harlot as well as between the two-horned beast and the eighth king. Thus, the eighth king may be seen as a political and military eschatological imperial power succeeding the previous seven in their task to support and carry the harlot.

⁴⁹Ellen G. White says that the enemies of God's people will be near to destroy them in the final time of probation. But, finally, they will use their weapons to destroy their spiritual leaders (religious power). Presumably, she is describing the effect of the sixth plague because that will happen after the close of intercession and before the second coming of Jesus (see White, *The Great Controversy*, 637, 639, 640, 655, 656).