

CHAPTER 17

Additional Notes
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The Great Prostitute: 17:1-2

1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. 2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

How is harlotry used metaphorically in the OT? The metaphor is used in two different ways. First, harlotry is used to describe the sin of Israel worshipping other gods:

See how the faithful city has become a harlot! ¹

Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute.²

However, it is not Israel that is symbolized here. The symbolism is all wrong: Israel could never be pictured as a harlot committing adultery with the kings of the earth.

Second, the metaphor of harlotry is applied to Gentile cities and nations, but in these cases it was not for spiritual unfaithfulness to God. Several different types of behavior are called harlotry. The description of the "harlotry" of Tyre is very similar to the symbolism here in Revelation 17:

At the end of seventy years, Yahweh will deal with Tyre. She will return to her hire as a prostitute and will ply her trade with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth.³

The context of this verse in Isaiah 23 describes the judgment on Tyre at the hand of the Babylonian Empire. However, seventy years after the city is destroyed, Yahweh will "visit" Tyre, and she will be rebuilt. That allows her to return to her trade as a harlot.

Why...is the trade [after Tyre's restoration] still designated by the term *commit fornication*? The answer would seem to be that the purpose of Tyre still was self-gratification, the making of money. She was not concerned at this point with the welfare of the kingdom of God, but only with what she could obtain. She would, therefore, sell her goods for what she could receive in exchange. Despite her downfall

¹ Isa. 1:21.

² Jer. 2:20 and many other references.

³ Isa. 23:17.

[seventy years earlier], she still would act as a harlot.⁴

So the harlotry of Tyre consists of "the prostitution of everything to commercial gain."⁵

Nineveh is another city called a harlot. The prophet Nahum describes her destruction and states that it is

*all because of the wanton lust of a harlot,
alluring, the mistress of sorceries,
who enslaved nations by her prostitution
and peoples by her witchcraft.*⁶

Of what did Nineveh's harlotry consist?

Of primary significance in this context...is the prostitute's motive of personal gain and the ominous attraction that she exercises to attain it, with fatal consequences for the victims....Nineveh's attraction is specified by the word "alluring," for her iniquity is overlaid with the splendor of her wealth and power. As Ahaz had been lured into unholy relations with Assyria formerly (cf. 2 Kings 16:7-18), so Nineveh had drained the life of those enticed by her smooth ways (cf. Isa 36:16-17). Both her quest for personal gain and the fate of the one attracted is evoked by the word "enslaved"..⁷

Put more concisely, Nineveh had played the harlot in that she had "enticed weaker nations by her display of power and splendor only to scorn and enslave them."⁸

However, the specific OT background to the symbolism in Revelation 17 is historical Babylon.

*Babylon was a gold cup in Yahweh's hand;
she made the whole earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine;
therefore they have now gone mad.
Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken.
Wail over her!*⁹

Thompson comments,

The theme of the cup of Yahweh's wrath is given a slightly different twist here....Babylon is pictured as a golden cup in Yahweh's hands. In a former day she had

4 Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), II:140.

5 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 221.

6 Nah. 3:4.

7 Carl E. Arerding, "Nahum," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), VII:481.

8 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 221

9 Jer. 51:7-8.

been Yahweh's instrument of wrath which was poured out on the nations...it was Babylon who gave them the cup to drink....The effect of drinking the potion was to make those who drank it behave like madmen.¹⁰

To summarize, Tyre prostituted herself for commercial gain, Nineveh was a harlot in that she enticed the nations and then enslaved them, and historical Babylon made the nations drunk with the wine of the wrath of God. The woman in Revelation 17 is said to have "committed adultery with the inhabitants of the earth" and also to have made the nations drunk "with the wine of her adulteries." Who is this woman and in what exactly did her harlotry consist? Before drawing any conclusions, however, more of her description should be noted.

First, the harlot in John's vision is said to "sit on many waters." This description is helpful in identifying the harlot. Jeremiah described ancient Babylon as "you who live by many waters."¹¹

This description ["who sits on many waters"] does not fit historical Rome, for while the Tiber flows through the city, Rome was not built upon many waters. The phrase does describe the historical Babylon, because the city was built on a network of canals.¹²

Second, in verse 15 the angel gives John additional information about the "many waters": "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages."

Third, the woman is explicitly called "Babylon" in the next section.

Babylon the Great: 17:3-6

3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. 5 This title was written on her forehead:

*MYSTERY
BABYLON THE GREAT
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

There is little doubt that this woman is the same as the "great prostitute" in verses 1-2. There is also little doubt that the Beast described here is the same as the first Beast in Revelation 13,

10 J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 750-751.

11 Jer. 51:13.

12 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 221-222.

that is, the Antichrist. The woman is said to be sitting on many waters in verse 1, while in verse 3 she is sitting on the Beast.

There is no problem in the fact that in vs. 1 the woman was seated upon many waters while here she is seated upon the scarlet beast. The fluidity of apocalyptic language allows it to represent different facts by the use of concepts which may seem to be logically contradictory. That she was seated upon many waters reflects her relationship to the nations of earth; that she is seated upon the scarlet beast reflects her relationship to the Antichrist. As the seat of godless civilization, the great harlot has achieved her glory because she has been made great by the beast and is completely dependent on it.¹³

Based on the metaphorical use of harlotry in the OT when applied to Gentiles, the woman represents "eschatological Babylon" who will, according to verse 2,

- Commit adultery with the kings of the earth
- Make the inhabitants of the earth drunk with the wine of her adulteries (the enticements by which she seduces the nations¹⁴)

Thus the woman represents the eschatological manifestation of ancient Babylon who will seduce all the nations of the world and make them drunk, this time not with the wine of the wrath of God as did historical Babylon, but "with the wine of her adulteries," the enticements by which she seduces the nations to worship the Antichrist.¹⁵ She herself was drunk, but with the blood of the saints killed by the Antichrist.

But is this harlot a real city, a religious entity, or a political entity? This question is answered after the Beast is discussed.

The Beast: 17:7-14

7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. 8 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

9 "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. 10 They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. 11 The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

¹³ Ibid., p. 223.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁵ Ibid.

12 "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. 13 They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

The Data Summarized

Table 1 compares the description of the Beast given in Revelation 13 with that of Revelation 17. Both state that the Beast has seven heads and ten horns (the phrases in red; see also 17:7 in Table 3). Premillenarians generally agree that this Beast represents the Antichrist who will reign during the seven-year Great Tribulation.¹⁶

Table 1

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
<p style="text-align: center;">Verses 1-2</p> <p>1 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. 2 The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Verse 3</p> <p>3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.</p>

Table 2 highlights the *first* point about this Beast: one of its heads "seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed" (the phrase in green). This observation is made three separate times, once in verse 3 and then with a subtle difference in verses 12 and 14.

¹⁶ See also 2 Thess. 2:1-12.

Table 2

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
<p>Verses 3, 12-14</p> <p>3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.</p> <p>12 He [the second beast, the "false prophet"] exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed...14 Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.</p>	

Table 3 highlights a ***second*** rather curious fact about this Beast: he once was, now is not, and yet will come" (the phrases in **blue**). In fact, this observation is made three separate times: twice in verse 8 and once in verse 11.

Table 3

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
	<p style="text-align: center;">Verses 7-8</p> <p>7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. 8 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.</p>

Table 4 points out the ***third*** descriptive statement: "The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits" (phrase in **purple**). Many expositors take the seven hills as a reference to Rome, since Rome is often referred to as the city on seven hills in Roman literature. However, it is difficult to connect Rome with the ***fourth*** interpretive description of the seven heads: "They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while" (phrase in **brown**).¹⁷

¹⁷ For the difficulty in identifying the "seven kings" as seven Roman emperors, see Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 227-229. For a much lengthier defense that the seven kings represent seven successive world empires, see Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, III:125-132.

Table 4

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
	<p style="text-align: center;">Verses 9-11</p> <p>9 "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. 10 They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. 11 The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.</p>

As an alternative, a hill or mountain is often a symbol of power or rule in the OT.¹⁸ Therefore, the seven hills more likely stand for seven successive empires. This comports well with simultaneous interpretation of the seven heads as seven kings. But is it legitimate to take "king" to mean "kingdom" or "empire"? Yes, this is common biblical usage. For example, in Daniel 7:17, the four beasts are said to represent "four kings," yet the vision is fulfilled by the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.¹⁹

Which kingdoms or empires are represented by the seven heads? The four empires depicted in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 must be included. In view of the fact that John lived under the sixth empire ("five are fallen, one is, the other has not yet come," vs. 10), this kingdom must be the historical Roman Empire. Thus, the first six empires would be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.²⁰

Table 4 concludes with the ***fifth*** characteristic of the Beast: "The beast...is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven" (phrase in **pink**).

Table 5 shows the ***sixth*** and final statement describing the Beast: "The ten horns you saw are

18 See, e.g., Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; and Dan. 2:35.

19 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 227-228: "It may be objected that John says the hills are also *seven kings*, not seven kingdoms; but this is common biblical language. The four beasts of Dan. 7 were said to represent four kings (Dan. 7:17) when, more precisely, Daniel means the kingdoms over which they rule." Similarly, Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 199: "The identification of a head with the government over which he has authority is not a strange situation. The person is often the symbol of the government, and what is said of the government can be said of him."

20 This is the conclusion of J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, III:129, Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 253, where he endorses Seiss' view, and Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, III:447.

ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast" (phrase in **turquoise**).

Table 5

Revelation 13	Revelation 17
	<p>Verses 12-13</p> <p>12 The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.</p> <p>13 They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.</p>

These ten kings rule simultaneously, and their domains form some sort of confederation under the Antichrist. According to Archer,

The ten horns, then, represent the ten nations who will combine at the beginning of the 70th week (Dan. 9) as a revived Roman Empire, with Antichrist emerging as their supreme leader through his speedy triumph over the rest of them. Thus they share authority with the Beast for only a short time ("one hour"). Note that they are described to John as having "not yet received a kingdom" (by 95 A.D.), and therefore yet future (in contradistinction to the five of the seven kings of v. 10 who have already fallen). Thus the seven kings are not to be confused with the ten horns of this verse.²¹

Walvoord agrees:

Further detail is given concerning the final stage of the world empire as having a nucleus of ten kings apparently joined in a confederacy represented by the ten horns. These kings in contrast to the seven heads of the beast are kings who rule not in succession but simultaneously at the end time.²²

Before commenting further on these various aspects of the Beast, here is a summary of his characteristics and what has been concluded so far:

- (1) One of the seven heads seemed to have a fatal wound, but the wound was healed

²¹ Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

²² Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 255.

(13:3, 12, 14).

- (2) The Beast once was, is not now, but will yet come (17:8, 11).
- (3) The seven heads are seven hills that (4) represent seven successive empires: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and a seventh yet to be discussed (17:9-10).
- (5) The Beast is an eighth king but belongs to the seven (17:11).
- (6) The ten horns represent ten contemporaneous kings that form an alliance of nations and give their authority over to the Beast (17:12-13).

What remains to be explained among these six points represents the *crux interpretum*²³ with regard to the Beast.

The Use of the Word "Beast"

In both 13:1 and 17:3, "the beast" is said to have seven heads, and therefore the word is used to represent the entire creature that John saw. However, in 13:3 one of the heads is said to have a fatal wound, while verses 12-14 state that "the beast" itself had the fatal wound. The following conclusion seems inescapable:

The fact that both one of the heads [13:3] and the beast himself [13:12, 14] received the mortal wound suggests that the beast is in some way to be identified with his seven heads...In the present passage [17:8], John makes it clear that the beast itself is to be identified with its heads. The slaying of one of the heads means the slaying of the beast.²⁴

There is more to say about this identity between the beast and his heads, but it must await the discussion under the next heading.

The Fatal Wound

As just noted under the previous heading, 13:3 states that "one of the heads of the beast" had the fatal wound, while verses 12 and 14 attribute the fatal wound to "the beast" himself. However, in some passages the "beast" is clearly *a man*, namely, the Antichrist, the

²³ A common phrase used in exegetical writing. Originating in Medieval times, it is Latin for *interpreters' cross*, referring to the "torment" of the interpreters or to a perplexing difficulty of interpretation.

²⁴ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 179, 226; cf. p. 183. Note that the quote actually has "his ten heads," but this is obviously a simple mistake and not Ladd's intent. Walvoord writes, "The solution to this intricate problem is that there is an identification...of the [future] world ruler with his world government" (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 249-250).

eschatological world ruler.²⁵ Yet the seven heads of the Beast represent seven kingdoms or empires. Therefore, in view of the common interchangeability between "king" and "kingdom," the question arises: Who or what receives the fatal wound, the Antichrist (the man) or one of the seven kingdoms?

Archer opts for the former, making both the death and revival to life apply to the eschatological Antichrist personally:

"His [the Antichrist's] rise to power in the Roman Confederacy is marked by one serious conflict in which he was gravely wounded (an assassination attempt?) apparently unto death."²⁶

Note that this view must take the wounded head to be the seventh, eschatological head.

Walvoord opts for the latter:

The wounding of one of the heads seems instead to be a reference to the fact that the Roman Empire as such seemingly died and is now going to be revived. It is significant that one of the heads is wounded to death but that the beast itself is not said to be dead. It is questionable whether Satan has the power to restore to life one who has died, even though his power is great.²⁷

This view seems more likely. Note, however, that Walvoord takes the wounded head to be the sixth head, representing the historical Roman Empire. As pointed out under the next heading, this is not the only option, although it too is probably the more likely.

Was, Is Not, Will Be

It was pointed out above that the interchange between the fatal wound to one of the Beast's heads in 13:3 and the fatal wound to the Beast itself in 13:12, 14 implies that the Beast in a general sense is to be identified with his seven heads. However, Ladd, following Zahn,²⁸ carries this a step further by combining the fatal wound descriptions with the additional statement that the beast "once was, now is not, and yet will come" (17:7-8, 11).

The seven heads with which the Beast in a general sense is identified represent seven anti-God, worldly kingdoms or empires. However, Ladd and Zahn argue that the Beast is in some special way more closely connected to two of the seven heads. The argument is based on 17:8, 11, which state that the Beast "once was, now is not, and yet will come." These three "stages" of the Beast suggest:

25 Cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10.

26 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, II:299-300, agrees with this position.

27 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 199.

28 Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 179, 229-231, and Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, III:440-441.

- The Beast was somehow directly related to one of the heads, one of the historical kingdoms ("he was").
- The Beast, through that head, received a fatal wound, and he, together with this kingdom, passed off the scene ("he was not").
- The beast will have another direct connection with another head or subsequent empire ("he will yet come").

This view raises two questions. First, in what sense is the Beast related more closely to these two heads or kingdoms than to the other five? According to Ladd, it is in his role as the Antichrist.

The symbolism is made difficult by the fact that the beast is sometimes identified with his heads, but is sometimes differentiated from them. The solution to this involved symbolism lies in the interpretation that the beast is the Antichrist, and yet he is not the Antichrist; he is the Antichrist in two of his heads only. As the Antichrist, he has already appeared in history (he was); he does not exist in the present, but he is yet to arise in an embodiment of satanic power. This is why John can say that one of the heads was wounded to death, but the death wound was healed; and also that the beast itself had received a death stroke and had come to life again. In other words, the beast is identified with two of its heads more closely than with the other five. In one of the heads, the beast had himself appeared in history; this head--and the beast himself--had been slain (i.e., had disappeared from history) but is to be revived in a final appearance, which will be a more complete manifestation of the beast than the first (i.e., he shall ascend from the abyss).²⁹

Based on this analysis, Ladd suggests a twofold meaning to "the Beast":

Still, the other five heads are also heads of the beast, yet it is not identified with them as with the two. The heads are successive manifestations of the worldly kingdoms at enmity with God through all the changes of history. The beast, then, has a twofold meaning: *broadly*, it is the anti-God worldly power; *narrowly*, it is one particular kingdom which has a twofold manifestation. Five of the heads are manifestations of the worldly kingdoms as such; two of the heads are specific embodiments of the beast himself.³⁰

The second question is this: Which heads are which? Which two heads, or which two kingdoms, represent the first and final manifestation of the Beast himself, the Beast as Antichrist? The identity of the second head is simple: it must be the final, eschatological kingdom, the kingdom of Antichrist during the tribulation period. Concerning the first manifestation of the Beast, both Ladd and Zahn are adamant that it is the fifth head, Greece.

²⁹ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 230.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; emphasis mine.

Their argument is based on Daniel 8, where Antiochus Epiphanes is quite clearly a type of the eschatological Antichrist.

However, it is exactly at this point that their view runs into serious difficulty. Although Ladd is strangely silent on this point, Zahn pushes this view to its logical conclusion: the seventh, eschatological kingdom of Antichrist is a revived Greek kingdom. This simply is impossible for the following reasons.

- Both Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 make it clear that the worldly kingdom destroyed at the second advent is the fourth kingdom--the Roman Empire. This point is sufficient by itself; the next two arguments simply lend support.³¹
- The imagery in Daniel 2 strongly suggests a twofold form of the fourth and last kingdom, the Roman Empire: legs of iron and feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. In Daniel's interpretation, the "toes" are specifically singled out, and it is on the feet that the image is struck by the rock and destroyed. The toes would clearly seem to correspond to the ten horns on the fourth beast of Daniel 7 and the Beast in Revelation 13 and 17.
- According to Daniel 9:26 in the prophecy of the seventy weeks, "the people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." This is taken by virtually everyone, Jewish and Christian, to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. The "people" who did this were the Romans. Now it is common among premillenarians to take "the ruler" to be the Antichrist who appears in the seventieth week. Therefore, this "ruler who will come" must be a Roman, and the seventh head must represent a revived Roman Empire.

Therefore, the intricate view of Ladd and Zahn must be rejected.

As Walvoord suggested, the head that received the fatal wound was the sixth kingdom, the Roman Empire. The wound was healed in the sense that the Roman Empire in some form is revived in the seventh and final head. Robert Culver offers a few additional observations:

The Roman emperors, and even the early kings who reigned before the republican and imperial periods, ruled largely by the will and choice of the populace. Republicanism, which followed the monarchical period, soon degenerated into something like mob rule, especially after it merged into the imperial period. Some of the greatest emperors were affected by the passing opinions of the Roman mobs. In our own times, which if they appear in the prophecy must be in the fourth period, government in the West has tended to become nearer to the dead level of socialism, and even "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Our American republic (ofttimes miscalled democracy) is based on

31 For the following two arguments, I am indebted to Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 197-198.

the supposition that sovereignty rests in the people--that government is only by the consent of the governed Now comes the denouement. The last, or eschatological portion of the prophecy is reached. When the final, that is, the Roman, age of Gentile history is prevailing, when a climax of division of sovereignty has been reached, presumably many nations being organized into some kind of a loose union in which all men give *their* authority to a ruler or head of some kind, when Gentile power is at its height of strength (though dangerously brittle by reason of a low grade of sovereignty, *then* the end comes. "*And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever*" (Dan. 2:44, A.S.V.).³²

However, on the basis of taking the wounded head to be the sixth or Roman head and the seventh head a revived Roman Empire, interpreting 17:8, 11 is more difficult: "the beast...once was, now is not, and yet will come." Was the Beast not present ("now is not") during John's time because one of the heads received a fatal wound as Ladd suggests? If so, that would make it impossible for the wounded head to be the sixth Roman head, which was indeed present during John's time.

However, if the two statements are disconnected and interpreted separately, another interpretation is possible. Not all of what Ladd argued is wrong. Antiochus Epiphanes is almost certainly an intended type of the eschatological Antichrist. So the Antichrist in a sense made an appearance through Antiochus ("once was"), who was obviously not around during John's time ("now is not"), but will definitely return to the scene in his final, eschatological manifestation during the tribulation ("yet will come").³³

The Eighth King

Revelation 17:11 presents one final interpretive problem. If the Beast only has seven heads, how can there be an eighth king or kingdom? Ladd offers the following answer:

John adds a further specific detail about the last appearance of the beast--the Antichrist: "the beast . . . is an eighth, but it belongs to the seven." This is difficult language. 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. This suggests that one of the seven is to experience two stages of his existence. This apparently is why John says that the seventh king "will remain only a little while" (vs. 10). He will be shortly followed by an eighth, who is the seventh in his full

32 Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, pp. 120-121.

33 Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* 4 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958, reprint 1871), IV:711, takes the "once was" stage of the Beast to be the pagan Roman Empire, the "now is not" stage the Christian phase of the empire beginning with Constantine, and the "will yet come" stage the eschatological Roman Empire. The problem with this view is the difficulty in explaining how the pagan stage was in the past for John.

antichristian manifestation. John means to say that the eighth is like the seven, but yet is different from them. It belongs to the seven in that it succeeds them in world domination; but it stands apart in that it ascends from the abyss as the full satanic embodiment of the beast.³⁴

This answer is somewhat complicated, but it is a possible explanation. One could add that the first "stage" might be the first three and a half years of the seven-year tribulation period during which the Antichrist makes his treaty with Israel and amasses his power. The second "stage" would then be the reign of the Antichrist during the second three and half years of the tribulation during which he breaks his treaty with Israel and unleashes his full wrath against Israel and all believers in Jesus Christ.

The Judgment of the Great Prostitute: 17:15-18

15 Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 16 The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Chapter 17 began with an angel summoning John to witness "the punishment of the great prostitute." The chapter now reaches that climax.

After discussing the great harlot in 17:1-6, these questions were raised: Is this harlot a real city, religious entity, or a political entity?

Walvoord's view can be summarized in the following particulars:³⁵

- The "Babylon" of chapter 17 and the "Babylon" of chapter 18 are not the same.
- Babylon, and thus the great harlot of chapter 17, is an ecclesiastical entity.
- Babylon of chapter 18 is a political entity.
- The Babylon, and thus the great harlot of chapter 17, is not a literal city but an apostate Christendom, an ecumenical world church that has united all religions.
- During the first three and a half years of the tribulation, the Antichrist uses the apostate church (the harlot) to persecute believers and consolidate his power.

³⁴ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 231.

³⁵ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 243-249, 255-257.

- At the middle of the tribulation, he no longer needs her and destroys the world church, proclaiming himself dictator of the whole world and demanding the worship of himself.

Walvoord's view is common in dispensationalism, but Ladd's view is preferred:³⁶

- The "Babylon" of chapter 17 and the "Babylon" of chapter 18 are the same.
- Babylon, and thus the great harlot, represent a literal city, "eschatological Babylon," although the identification of this city with a historical city cannot be made.
- This city will be the capital of the Antichrist, the seat of godless civilization. As such, it will be the capital city of a complex civilization consisting of many nations and the center of the seduction that entices the nations to worship the Beast.
- As the capital city of the Antichrist, she will be the city primarily responsible for the persecution and martyrdom of the saints.
- John gives no reason why the Beast and the ten kingdoms under him suddenly destroy this city except that it is God's will.

The Beast and his coalition will be victorious for a short period. But the end is perdition when the Lamb overcomes them, *"for He is Lord of lords and King of kings."*

³⁶ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 221-228, 232-234.