

The Antichrist Prophecies

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Introduction

We have previously mentioned the Antichrist but without having actually identified him. That is the purpose for this presentation. We will examine four prophecies of the Antichrist in this paper: (1) Daniel 7; (2) Revelation 13; (3) II Thessalonians 2; and (4) Revelation 17. We will examine Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 in the context of Revelation 13 because its description borrows some of its imagery from the former. We believe that Daniel 8 also concerns the Antichrist, but it will be analyzed in a separate paper.

Revelation 13 and Daniel 7

Revelation 13 describes a sea beast that was given power, a throne, and great authority by the dragon (v. 2), that had a global following (v. 3) that worshiped it (vv. 4, 8), was guilty of blasphemy (vv. 1, 5-6), that persecuted God's faithful people (v. 7), that operated for a period of forty-two months (v. 5), and that received a deadly wound (vv. 3, 9-10; cf. vv. 12, 14).

Obviously, this sea beast is symbolic of something else. Note the composite nature of this beast as described by its characteristics which are attributed to a *leopard*, a *bear*, and a *lion* (v. 2). The references to a leopard, a bear, and a lion draws the reader to Daniel 7's prophecy about four beasts, the first three of which were a symbolic lion, a symbolic bear, and a symbolic leopard (Daniel 7:3-6)—appearing in the reverse order in Revelation 13:2. The fourth beast in Daniel 7 was symbolic of what could be described as a dragon, although that term is not used in the chapter. Note also that the four beasts in that chapter had a total of seven heads—one each on the first, second, and fourth beasts and four on the third beast—and ten horns (Daniel 7:3-7). Note that the sea beast has royal *crowns* on his ten horns. We find a similar seven-headed, ten-horned beast in 12:3 and 17:3. The difference is that beast (dragon) in 12:3 has royal crowns on its heads and the beast in 17:3 has no crowns at all. Perhaps the significance of the crowns on the ten horns here in chapter 13 is to the fact that this beast operates during the time of the division of the Roman Empire symbolized by the ten horns in Daniel 7 (See our paper entitled "Israel and the Church" for an exposition of Daniel 7 except for the little horn).

It is also significant that Daniel 7's focus is on a little horn that arises among the ten horns on the fourth beast (Daniel 7:7-8) and which spoke blasphemy and persecuted God's people for a period of three-and-a-half times (Daniel 7:25). All of this means that the sea beast and the little horn represent different symbols for the same power, which historicist and futurist scholars agree is the Antichrist. Therefore, we will use data in both Revelation 13 and Daniel 7 to determine the identity of the Antichrist.

The Antichrist will Rise to Power among Great Multitudes and Nations

Revelation 13:1 says the beast arises from the *sea*. According to Revelation 17:15, symbolic water represents *peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues*. Note also that the second beast in Revelation 13 arises from the *earth* (v. 11) in apparent contrast with the *sea*. In chapter 12, the *earth* (12:16) seems to be another word for *wilderness* (vv. 6, 14). Thus, they both seem to refer to more desolate regions. Of course, there is nothing unusual in rising from such a symbolic sea, for most nations in history have arisen from among more populated regions where *peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues* (Revelation 17:15) reside.

The Antichrist is a Political Power

It is a political power because it is portrayed as a symbolic beast and a symbolic horn, each of which represents political kingdoms, as explained below.

In Daniel 7, the four beasts introduced in verses 3-7 are identified as four kings (v. 17). In verse 23 the fourth beast is also identified as a *fourth kingdom* (cf. v. 24). Therefore, the term *kings* must refer to the kings as representing their kingdoms. Thus, the emphasis is on kingdoms rather than individual kings.

In Daniel 8, two beasts are introduced in verses 3-8, a ram and a male goat. The ram is identified as *the kings of Media and Persia* (v. 20), a reference to the dual kingdom of Medo-Persia. The male goat is explained as *the king of Greece* (v. 21). However, it is better to say that the kingdom of Medo-Persia was by defeated by another kingdom. Thus, the term king of Greece is used to represent his kingdom.

The idea that beasts in Daniel are sometimes called kings only as representing their kingdoms is confirmed by the parallel chapter of Daniel 2 with Daniel 7. There a vision was given to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (technically Neo-Babylonia); see verses 1-7. The first four parts of this vision were parts of a man (vv. 31-33). The first part, or head (vv. 32, 38), represents Nebuchadnezzar or his kingdom (v. 38). Then the next three parts of the man are identified as *another kingdom, another, and the fourth kingdom* in verses 39 and 40. Thus, we see that all four parts are symbolic of kingdoms. Because all scholars see that the parts of this human image are

parallel to the four beasts in chapter 7, we conclude that symbolic beasts in Daniel actually represent kingdoms.

The horns in Daniel 7 and 8 also represent kingdoms except when the context requires the interpretation of an individual king (8:21-22).

The Antichrist is a Religious Power

The Antichrist is also a religious power because it is guilty of blasphemy (Revelation 13:1, 6; cf. Daniel 7:25) and it demands worship (Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15). Daniel 7:25 describes the work of the little horn in poetic parallelism as follows (some Bible versions correctly show this as poetry, such as the New King James' Version and the Revised Standard Version):

- A *He shall speak pompous words against the Most High*
- B *Shall persecute the saints of the Most High*
- A¹ *And shall intend to change times and law*
- B¹ *Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time*

It is immediately obvious that lines B and B¹ are parallel to each other, with both describing persecution against God's faithful people. Therefore, lines A and A¹ must be parallel to each other. This means that the *times and law* the little horn seeks to change are things that belong to God. Note that the little horn *shall intend* to change God's times and law. The KJV and the RSV reads that he would *think* to change those things. In other words, the little horn will believe he has the authority to change God's *times and law* even though he does not possess such authority.

According to the New Testament, claiming divine prerogative is the sin of blasphemy. This can be seen in the incident where Jesus forgave a man's sins, and the Jewish leaders present accused Him of blasphemy (Matthew 9:2-3; Mark 2:5-7, and Luke 5:18-21). On two other occasions the Jewish leaders also accused Jesus of blasphemy, both times when they perceived Him claiming to be God (John 10:33 and in Matthew 26:63-65; Mark 14:61-64). Therefore, the little horn will claim to officially represent God on earth and assume the prerogatives that belong only to God.

Since the little horn in Daniel 7 and the sea beast in Revelation 13 represent that same Antichrist power, it is quite evident that the sea beast is not only a kingdom but also a religious power who claims to speak for God, even to change His law, and who persecutes the faithful people of God. In this, the sea beast is guilty of blasphemy and is therefore a religious power.

How can a political kingdom demand worship? One cannot bow down and worship a political kingdom in the ordinary way people worship. However, anything that people place before God is an object of worship in a broader sense. Apparently this kingdom will demand that the world give

it some form of religious allegiance—as in conforming to a religious demand—and in this way a political kingdom that is also a religious power can be worshiped.

The Antichrist will be a Christian Church

Revelation 13:11-17 describes a second beast who will enforce worship of the Antichrist after the latter's deadly wound was healed (v. 14; cf. vv. 9-10). This second beast is described as lamblike in nature. The word for *lamb* or *lamb's* is used twenty-nine times in the book of Revelation, where twenty-eight times it obviously refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). Therefore, it appears virtually certain that this power represents at least nominal Christianity in some way. It is another symbolic beast so that we must understand it as a nation. But it is *not* also a religious power because it does not demand religious allegiance to itself; instead, it enforces religious allegiance to the Antichrist. Therefore, it is only a political nation whose majority population must call themselves Christian.

If the population of the nation that will enforce religious allegiance to the Antichrist claims Christianity, then it is almost certain that the Antichrist itself claims to be Christian as well. Because the sea beast is organized as a political kingdom, its religious side must also be organized as an institution. Such an organized Christian entity is called a church. Therefore, the Antichrist is also a Christian church.

The Antichrist will Rise to Power in Western Europe After the Fall of Rome

In order to show that this is a true mark of identification for the sea beast, we must examine the little horn in Daniel 7 because it is the parallel symbol to the sea beast in Revelation 13. First, we have already noted that the four beasts in Daniel 7 represent four kingdoms. Since they begin with Babylon (technically, Neo-Babylonia), a look at secular history reveals the four as (1) Babylon, (2) Medo-Persia, (3) Greece, and (4) Rome.

Daniel 7 describes ten horns on the fourth kingdom. The context in Daniel 7 does not make it immediately clear whether the ten horns are kingdoms or kings. Therefore, it will require a more careful analysis to make this determination.

As applied to Rome, the ten horns could not represent ten kingdoms *or* kings that existed during the time of the Roman Empire, for that kingdom did not consist of ten other kingdoms, nor did ten kings reign in association with Rome during its time of rule. The ten horns could not represent ten successive kingdoms *or* kings following the fall of the Roman Empire, for how would they be identified in history? It simply does not fit the historical record.

So first we should seek to determine if the ten horns are successive or simultaneous in nature. We understand that they are simultaneous in nature for at least two reasons. First, there is no language in the prophecy to indicate that they are successive in nature. Second, Daniel 7:8 describes the little horn as *coming up among them*, that is, among the ten horns. If the ten horns arose successively, then the text could not say that the little horn arose *among* them. If the little horn arose from among the ten horns, those horns must exist simultaneously.

If the ten horns existed simultaneously with each other, and we cannot identify either ten kingdoms *or* kings in association with the Roman Empire, then these horns must arise successively *after* the domination of Rome. This matches the testimony of history and the parallel segment on Daniel 2's image of the man, where the feet and ten toes followed Rome, during a time characterized by tension and disunity (*they will not adhere to one another* (Daniel 2:43). These ten horns, then, must represent ten kingdoms that arose after the fall of Rome, for it is much more natural to view these as kings representing their kingdoms than to understand them strictly as ten kings.

Futurist scholars agree with historicists that the ten horns represent kings or kingdoms that exist simultaneously. However, they interpret this period of time as existing near the end of time in connection with the end-time Antichrist. Specifically, futurists identify the feet and toes in Daniel 2, the ten horns in Daniel 7, and the ten kings in Revelation 17 (vv. 12-17) as all parallel prophecies. However, we must disagree for at least two reasons. First, the emphasis in Daniel 2:43 is on tension and disunity, as seen in its testimony that *iron does not mix with clay* and *they will not adhere to one another*. But in Revelation 17, the emphasis is on unity and cooperation in that verse 13 declares that *These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast*. There is no hint of discord or disunity among the end-time ten kings or kingdoms. Second, Daniel 7:8, 24 tells us that three of the ten horns would be plucked up or defeated. This would leave only seven horns. By contrast, Revelation 17 speaks of all ten kings or kingdoms remaining in existence cooperating with each other. Even when they turn against the woman riding that symbolic beast, it is all ten who do so. Even if the number ten in either or both Daniel 7 and Revelation 17 is symbolic of a totality, the number seven is not the number ten. Therefore, we confirm our conclusion that the ten horns in Daniel 7 belong to the period in history following the fall of Rome, in which that empire was replaced in the West with the so-called barbarian tribes.

Historically, the only power that fulfilled all of these specifications is the Papal Church. Like most nations, it arose from a densely populated region of the world in Western Europe. It did so after the fall of Rome, dated by most historians to A.D. 476. It was both a Christian religious power and a political kingdom. It claims the authority to change God's law and to exercise His authority and power on earth because it claims that the Pope is the substitute for God on earth. The persecution of those who dared to oppose it was one of the ways it has claimed to exercise divine authority and power. No other entity in world history fits these specifications.

But does it fit the other four specifications mentioned in Revelation 13 and Daniel 7? Did it receive its power, throne, and great authority from the dragon? Did he defeat three of the ten kingdoms after the division of the Roman Empire? Has it received a deadly wound? And did it dominate for one thousand two hundred sixty years in its first phase?

The Antichrist's Power, Throne, and Authority

Revelation 13:2 states that the dragon will give the sea beast *his power, his throne, and great authority*. A *throne* represents the seat of power for a nation. The giving of a throne constitutes the giving of a capital because the throne is in a nation's capital city. The dragon is ultimately Satan (Revelation 12:9), but Satan could not have given the sea beast a throne or capital because he operates in the invisible world of angels. However, he works through human agencies to do his work. If the sea beast is Papal Rome, then we should inquire whether or not another political kingdom gave it its throne or capital. Historically, we know that as the Roman Empire was failing in the West, the Papal church, which was centered in the city of Rome, increasingly gained in political stature. This was done with the cooperation and blessing of the Roman emperors living in Constantinople by that time. Thus, Pagan Rome gave the Papacy its *throne* or capital, which accompanied its *authority*. Its *power* also came from Pagan Rome, as Roman armies fought the enemies of Papal authority on its behalf. Therefore, the Papal church matches the specification of Revelation 13:2 by being given *his power, his throne, and great authority* by Pagan Rome.

The Antichrist Defeated 3 Tribes in the Divided Roman Empire

According to Daniel 7:8, 20, 24, the little horn would defeat three of the ten kingdoms following the fall of the Roman Empire. Did the Papacy actually do this? Yes. Three kingdoms opposed the teaching of the Roman Church that Jesus was fully God as well as a man. Three of the kingdoms adopted the Arian view instead, that Christ was a created being who was only elevated by God. They were the Heruli, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths. In the first half of the sixth century (the 500s), each of these so-called barbarian tribes was defeated by the Roman Empire on behalf of Papal Rome. These defeats allowed the Papacy to grow its *authority and power* unchallenged by military powers representing religious opposition to it.

The Antichrist Received a Deadly Wound

Did the Papacy receive a *deadly wound* as foretold in Revelation 13:3, 9-10, 12, 14? To answer this question, we must first determine what is meant by the *sword* that would inflict this deadly wound (vv. 9-10, 14). The word *sword* most often appears in Scripture as a weapon of soldiers. Therefore, we should look for the fulfillment of this specification to an army that defeats the Papacy. Verse 10 associates this *sword* with the word for *captivity*. A church cannot be made captive, so we would expect that the head of this church, the Pope, to be taken captive by an army.

Since we have previously established that all three kingdoms that opposed the Papacy were defeated in the first half of the sixth century, leaving it unchallenged by other kingdoms, we should date the official beginning of the Papal rule in that time period. One thousand two hundred sixty years later would place the end of the first phase of Papal Rome (marked by the deadly wound) around the turn of the nineteenth century. Was the Pope captured and taken into captivity by an army around the turn of the nineteenth century? Yes. General Berthier, acting on orders from Napoleon, marched into Rome and took the Pope captive in 1798. This event thus marked the official end of the Papacy's rule in its first phase. However, this fact indicates that the time of the pre-wound phase of the Papacy is based on a symbolic interpretation. We turn to that next.

The Forty-Two Months Date from 538 to 1798

Revelation 13:5 identifies a period of 42 months during which the Antichrist would reign, and Daniel 7:25 says it is 3 ½ times. Furthermore, Revelation 12:6 equates a period of 1,260 days with verse 14's 3 ½ times. [The latter two time periods represent the same time because v. 6 and vv. 13-16 obviously speak of the same event.] Actually, all three time periods are the same—42 months, 1,260 days, and 3 ½ times. How? By assuming exactly 360 days per *time* (year) and 30 days per month, we see that they all represent the same period of time:

360 days times 3 ½ times equals 1,260 days.

42 months times 30 days per month equals 1,260 days.

But are these literal days or symbolic of a larger period of time? We believe they are symbolic for at least four reasons. First, these time periods are all given in a highly symbolic context, suggesting but not proving that they may also be symbolic. Second, 42 months and 3 ½ times are both unusual ways to express a literal time of 1,260 days. Third, the 42 months and 3 ½ times are not based on any calendar. It is true that the Jews and others in the ancient world had 30-day months. However, the Jewish calendar alternated between months of 29 and 30 days respectively. Also, after at least every three years the Jewish calendar added a 13th month to make up for the loss in days representing a solar year. This all suggests that the time elements here are symbolic. Finally, the structure of Revelation 12 confirm this understanding:

- *Early Christian Era*—the time revolving around Jesus' first coming (12:4-5).
- *Middle Christian Era*—the wilderness experience of persecution and protection (12:6, 13-16).
- *Late Christian Era*—the dragon's wrath against the woman is against the woman's rest (remnant) of her offspring (12:17). Note: The word for rest or remnant indicates the last portion of something, as in the remnant on a bolt of cloth.

Note that the time periods (1,260 days and 3 ½ times) apply to the middle Christian Era, not the late portion. Historically, this would have to apply to the persecution by the Roman Church during most of the Middle Ages. Therefore, the period of time must be symbolic of a much longer period than its literal interpretation. The only common denominator among the three time expressions is a day (360-day only years, 30-day only months for 42 months, 1,260 days), so we should inquire if the Scriptures ever use a day as symbolic of a longer specific period of time. It does and only in one way. According to Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6, a symbolic day represents a literal year when specific time is meant. This is the year-day principle that historicists, including those sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers, have recognized. Therefore, the 1,260 days represent 1,260 literal years.

Having deduced that the official beginning of the pre-wound phase of Papal Rome was at some point in the first half of the sixth century, and that its official end was marked by the military capture of the Pope in 1798, we can discover the official date for the beginning by simple math. 1798 minus 1260 equals 538. Can the year 538 mark the defeat of the Ostrogoths, the last of the three kingdoms that were defeated? Yes, they were decisively defeated in that year. Although they returned to occupy the city of Rome in 540, that occupation was short-lived, and the Ostrogothic kingdom eventually disappeared from history. It was their decisive defeat in 538 that allowed the Papacy to begin its domination of Western Europe and is therefore the appropriate date for the beginning of the one thousand two hundred sixty-year period. Therefore, the period of one thousand two hundred sixty years began in 538 and ended in 1798.

With the evidence deduced from Daniel 7, Revelation 13, and history, there should be no reasonable doubt that the Papacy is the Antichrist. Since 1798 the Papacy has regained its political status based in Rome. Even though it again lost its nation-state in 1870 under the newly-formed united government of Italy, it was restored by the Lateran Treaty in 1929 and has continued in existence to date ever since. Moreover, its political influence in the world has been growing, especially since the 1980s, when it played a major behind-the-scenes role in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. All that awaits is its full restoration unto its final phase of domination.

The Beast that Assists the Antichrist

Antichrist will have a powerful helper mentioned in Revelation 13:11-18 as the one who will use deceit and force to get the whole world to give spiritual allegiance to him. In Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10, he is called the false prophet. We know that the two are the same entity because 19:20 says the false prophet uses signs to deceive people to receive the mark of the beast, which is exactly what 13:14 says the second beast in Revelation 13 will do.

In the third scene John sees *another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon* (v. 11). Who is this lamblike beast? First, we note that it must be a

nation because a symbolic beast represents kingdoms or nations. Second, it had *two horns like a lamb*, which would point to its relative youthfulness. Furthermore, the reference to a *lamb* reminds us that this word or its possessive form (*Lamb's*) occurs twenty-nine times in the book, and twenty-eight times (all but here) it refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God, as all scholars seem to agree. This strongly points to this *lamb* as being at least a nominal Christian nation. It is *not* also a religious power because it does not accept worship but rather enforces the worship of the sea beast (vv. 12-17). Therefore, we conclude that reference to this beast as lamblike means that its population as a whole claims Christianity.

This lamblike beast is seen *coming up out of the earth*. This seems to be a specific contrast to the sea beast that arose from the *sea* (v. 1). In Revelation 12 we note two things about its reference to the *earth* (12:16). First, the *earth* was parallel to the *wilderness* in verses 6 and 14 as referring to the more desolate regions of the world, where God's people were somewhat protected from persecution. Second, the *earth* represented the movements which helped swallow up the flood sent by the dragon to engulf God's people (Revelation 12:16), including the Protestant Reformation, Enlightenment, and the American Revolution. This evidence suggests that the lamblike beast is a nation that arose from a relatively sparse part of the world and which initially was associated with the major themes of the Protestant Reformation, Enlightenment, and the American Revolution. Unfortunately, at the end-time it will speak *like a dragon* in that it enforces the worship of the sea beast. A nation speaks through its laws and actions so that this lamblike beast will turn its back on the principles associated with its founding.

The last thing to note about this lamblike beast is that its enforcement of the sea beast's religious authority will be global in scope. This is understood by its two references to those *who dwell on the earth* (v. 14; cf. v. 12) and to the fact that *all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave*, will be compelled to worship the sea beast. For one nation to have this much influence on the whole world points to it as a major world power or superpower in the world by the time it speaks *like a dragon*.

Could this lamblike nation exist today? We conclude that it does and that it is the United States of America, for only that nation meets all the specifications of the prophecy. First, it is a relatively young nation whose majority population professes Christianity. Second, it arose from a sparsely populated region of the world and was initially associated with the ideals of the Protestant Reformation, Enlightenment, and the American Revolution. That is to say, its people were overwhelmingly Protestant and it was founded on the principles of the Enlightenment, including an emphasis on the natural rights of men as seen in its representative form of government, its Bill of Rights, and its separation of Church and State. Finally, it rose to world power by the early twentieth century and developed into a superpower by the end of World War II.

II Thessalonians 2

The Context

The Christian church at Thessalonica was evidently quite concerned about the return of Jesus. From I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, part of Paul's first epistle to that church, we can deduce that part of their concern was the fate of loved ones who had already died and how they would relate to the Second Coming of Jesus. Here in II Thessalonians 2 we see that someone, apparently quoting Paul, had shaken them up by telling them that *the day of the Lord* (better Greek text of v. 2) had already come. Of course, they knew that the visible return of Jesus, which Paul had written to them about in his previous letter, had not yet occurred. But the day of the Lord included so many end-time events that they were worried the final events may have already been triggered. In this chapter Paul assures the believers that this had not happened, and that furthermore, it would not occur until certain negative developments within the Christian Church as a whole had taken place first.

The Second Coming and the Rapture

Paul used the Greek word *parousia* in reference to *the coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ* in verse 1. *Parousia* means an *arrival and consequent* presence, hardly a secret affair. Note also that the apostle Paul speaks in verse 1 about the believers *gathering together* to Jesus. This expression refers to the *rapture*, taken from the Latin word *rapio*, a fact which futurists acknowledge. Not only are the Second Coming and the rapture spoken of in the same context here, but the Second Coming is actually mentioned first. Indeed, the same is true in the greatest Second Coming chapter of them all, Matthew 24, where verse 31 associates the rapture with Christ sending *His angels with a great sound of a trumpet*. Therefore, the rapture of the saints will occur at the one visible, audible, public Second Coming of Christ.

The Apostasy

In verse 3, Paul declares that the Second Coming of Jesus and the rapture of the saints will not occur until *the falling away* occurs and *the man of sin* is revealed. The Greek for *the falling away* is *apostasia*, meaning *the apostasy*. First, note the presence of the definite article (*the*), which makes this a reference to a very specific apostasy, one that Paul had orally told them about in a previous meeting, according to verse 5. Second, *apostasia* in classical Greek was a word used to describe a political or military coup. More importantly, in the Biblical context, the Septuagint frequently and consistently applied this same word to a rebellion against God by His own professed people, as in Joshua 22:22. It is also the feminine form of another Greek word which refers to separation or divorce. Paul was referring to a then-future rebellion among God's professed people, who were Christians in his day, of course. Therefore, he was teaching that there would be a major,

specific, and awful apostasy within the Christian Church before the Second Coming of Jesus and the rapture of the saints.

The Man of Lawlessness

Futurists tend to teach that the apostasy here and the work of *the man of lawlessness* are two different and unrelated events. However, the more natural way to read this passage suggests that the man of lawlessness is the leader of this apostasy. Also, the very titles used for him lead to the same conclusion. The Greek word for *lawlessness* means a state of being in opposition to law or being without law, which certainly is consistent with the concept of *apostasia* being a rebellion. He is also called *the son of perdition* in verse 3. That title is used only one other time in the New Testament, in John 17:12, where it is applied to Judas Iscariot, the traitor to Jesus right within His inner circle of the early church. The spiritual description of him in verse 4 adds to the evidence that he is the leader of the apostasy. There he is described as one who sits in *the temple of God*, claiming the status of God. However one interprets the reference to the temple here, the language makes it obvious that it is from his position in the temple that he makes his lofty claims.

From this description of the man of lawlessness in verse 4 as the one who opposes and exalts himself above God, he is almost certainly the end-time Antichrist, as futurists and nearly all other scholars agree. Paul's statement, then, means that the Second Coming of Jesus and the rapture of the saints will not occur until after the Antichrist makes his appearance on the scene of action, a teaching which again conflicts with dispensational futurism. Even more astonishing, perhaps, is the realization that because II Thessalonians was written to Christian believers, and concerns rebellion against God among His own professed people, this apostasy must be within the Christian Church, and its leader must be a professed Christian.

The Antichrist opposes God by attempting to exalt himself to God's level. This is precisely what Lucifer does, according to Isaiah 14:13-14. As a Christian, then, he is not opposing God outright. But like his mentor Lucifer, who is not an atheist, the man of lawlessness opposes God by claiming God's authority to act on behalf of God on the earth. This claiming of divine prerogatives is what the New Testament identifies as the sin of blasphemy, as in Matthew 9:1-6; 26:65, and John 10:33,36. Although all this is surprising information to most modern Christians, who think of the Antichrist as an end-time atheistic dictator, the Greek prefix *anti* can just as easily mean *in place of* as it does *against*. In fact, the two meanings are not at all conflicting. The Antichrist stands *against* God because he claims to stand *in place of* Him in the minds and hearts of Christians, and others too, eventually. Thus, the related concept of separation or divorce to this apostasy means that the spiritual divorce from Jesus is not a visible or organizational separation from Christianity. Rather, it is a separation from the truth while masquerading as the ultimate source of truth.

So what does the reference to the *temple of God*, where the Antichrist sits, mean? The Bible only

speaks of God's temple in five different ways: (1) the Jerusalem Temple; (2) the heavenly sanctuary (see the books of Hebrews and Revelation); (3) individual Christian believers (I Corinthians 6); (4) the Christian Church (I Corinthians 3:16-17), or (5) God the Father or Jesus (John 2:19-21; Revelation 21:22).

The temple at Jerusalem, even when it was standing or if it is ever rebuilt, would not be the place of authority or headquarters for a professed Christian leader. Although the Antichrist claims divine prerogatives, he could not literally make his headquarters in the sanctuary in heaven. Because he is referred to as a *man*, not a spirit being, he cannot literally abide within individual believers either, nor in the Father or Jesus, of course. However, as a professed Christian leader, he *can* be said to make his headquarters within the Christian Church. This fits the context perfectly, and therefore, it must be the correct interpretation.

Metaphorically, by claiming divine prerogatives, he may be said to think of himself as sitting on God's throne in the heavenly temple. But of course, there is a definite connection between the heavenly temple and God's temple of faithful Christian believers on the earth. This makes the Antichrist an extremely dangerous leader because he claims Christianity as his own; indeed, he claims to sit in the very seat of Christianity. And from there, he will have to use deception and counterfeit truths which will look very close to the genuine in order to fool most Christian believers and almost the entire world, which is what we are warned about in passages such as II Thessalonians 2:9-10, Matthew 24:24, Revelation 13:13-14, and 16:13-14.

The Restraining Power

In verses 6-7, Paul speaks of a power which was restraining the work of the Antichrist and preventing him from being revealed. Interestingly, in verse 6 he uses the neuter gender in referring to the restrainer as *what is restraining*, while in verse 7 he uses the masculine gender pronoun *he*. This use of two different genders to describe the restrainer strongly suggests that it is an institutional power headed by a man. In addition, this power already existed in Paul's day for it *is restraining* (v. 6) and *now restrains* (v. 7).

The same double gender usage is applied by the apostle to the Antichrist. Note that *the mystery of lawlessness* (v. 7) is interchangeable with *the lawless one* (v. 8), and thus with *the man of lawlessness* as well. The Greek word for *mystery* is in the neuter gender, while the noun *man* and the pronoun *he* is, of course, masculine (vv. 3-4, 6). Therefore, like the restraining power, the Antichrist appears to be an institutional power headed by a man.

But why is it called a *mystery*? For most of the New Testament, the Greek word for *mystery* is used to define something which is hidden to most people, but that God has revealed to His own people. This is specifically and most often the gospel of Jesus Christ, as in Romans 16:25-26, I

Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 1:9-10, and Colossians 1:26-27. It seems, then, that *mystery* is used here instead of *man* in order to imply that the Antichrist proclaims a false gospel.

Verse 7 informs us that *the mystery of lawlessness is already at work*, although it had not been revealed yet. So the Antichrist was taking shape in some form already in Paul's day, albeit behind the scenes and thereby not recognizable as this power yet. But it will be revealed as soon as the restraining power *is taken out of the way*. This means that the Antichrist should begin his counterfeit Christian work fairly early in the Christian Era. An objection is sometimes made to this view by interpreting verse 8 to mean that very soon after the revelation of the Antichrist, Christ's Second Coming would occur and destroy it. However, verse 8 does not necessarily mean that Christ will return immediately after the Antichrist is revealed, but only that the same Antichrist will continue until the Second Coming.

Some dispensational futurists identify the restraining power as the Holy Spirit, who see His removal as constituting the removal of the Church in the rapture. In other words, because the Holy Spirit was promised to always be with Christians, His removal must mean the removal of Christians themselves. Of course, we have already seen from verses 1-3 of this prophecy that the Antichrist makes his appearance *before* the rapture of the saints, not *after* it. Beyond that, the use of the neuter gender for the restrainer in verse 6 dispels this theory; God is not an *it*, but is consistently referred to in Scripture as *He*. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how God the Holy Spirit could be *taken out of the way* (v. 7), an expression implying that a hostile power would remove the restrainer.

So what is this restraining power? We know that it is an institutional power headed by a man, that it existed in Paul's day, and that fairly early in the history of Christianity, it would be removed by one or more hostile powers. In addition, we see that Paul had already told the Thessalonian believers orally who this power was, but that he seemed quite uncomfortable with identifying it in writing (see vv. 5-6). All this evidence points to the Roman Empire as this restraining power. After all, the only institutional power headed by a man (emperor) in existence in the Christian part of the world capable of having any significant impact on the Church was the Roman Empire. This is the only power which is consistent with all the evidence. Therefore, the fall of Rome should lead to the revealing of the Antichrist, who will be operative until the return of Jesus Christ (v. 8).

The Antichrist Unmasked

In order to identify *the man of lawlessness* (Antichrist), then, we should look for a highly significant developing institutional power, headed by a man, within the Christian Church, which claims divine prerogatives, especially the authority to speak for Jesus Himself to the Church on earth, and which arises about the time of the fall of Rome. Furthermore, it is at least suggested by verse 7 that the Antichrist takes the place in some way of the restraining power since the latter has

to be *taken out of the way* for the Antichrist to become fully operational.

Does history record the rise of such an institutional power within Christianity at that time, one which in some way took the place of the Roman Empire? Yes. The only such power which meets all these specifications is the institution of the Papacy, the organizational heart of the Roman Catholic Church. No other institution comes even remotely close to fitting the prophecy. A brief historical sketch of the early rise of the Papacy follows.

Early Rise of the Papacy

It was probably only natural that the Church in the capital of the Roman Empire would be viewed with greater prestige than any other local church. Even the apostle Paul, in Romans 1:8, commended the church for its faith, well known throughout the world already in his day. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch (in Syria), who was martyred about A.D. 110, referred to the church there as *foremost in love*. In the second half of the second century, Irenaeus (bishop of Lyons, France) developed the doctrine of apostolic succession, the idea that the purity of Christian truths was protected because the bishops were the official successors of the apostles. Further, he declared that the church at Rome had always preserved the truth, and because of its status and authority, every church must agree with her.

The first bishop, or Pope, of Rome to attempt to assert his authority outside the region around the city of Rome was Pope Victor I (189-198), but he was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, by the time of the Council of Nicea (325), the bishop of Rome was universally considered the “first among equals [of bishops].” However, it was not until Pope Leo I (440-461) that the Papacy first claimed universal supremacy over the entire Christian Church. He did much to enhance the prestige and authority of the Papacy, even though the churches in the eastern part of the empire never did acknowledge his universal supremacy.

Meanwhile, Christianity was legalized by Emperor Constantine in his Edict of Milan (or Edict of Toleration) in 313, shortly after the emperor himself announced that he had become a Christian. The resulting popularity of Christianity in the fourth century further corrupted the Church, especially in Rome itself, as half-converted pagans brought into the Church with them their long-held pagan beliefs and customs. Then because of increasing threats by barbarian tribes from the north, Constantine moved the capital of the empire to New Rome in 330, a city which quickly became known as Constantinople, which had been built on the site of the Greek city of Byzantium, and which later became Istanbul, Turkey. This move left a political vacuum in the West, which the rising Papacy was only too willing to fill. Even though the Roman Empire was officially divided into two halves, East and West, about 395, when Emperor Theodosius I died and left a will declaring the empire divided between his two sons. The political status and prestige of imperial Rome never returned. It was the Pope who exercised more political, as well as religious,

authority in the West. Then in 476, the city of Rome fell to the barbarians, and the Roman Empire in the West ceased to exist.

But as part of one last effort to reunite the halves of the empire, Emperor Justinian officially named the Papal head *the corrector of heretics* and *head of all the churches* in 533. Five years later, in 538, when Western armies, under the authority of the Pope, defeated the last of the heretical barbarian tribes which opposed Papal supremacy, it can clearly be said that the Papacy had become *the* single most important institution in the West, both religiously and politically. And this event came just 62 years after the fall of Rome, fitting the apostle Paul's prophecy that when the restraining power had been removed, *the man of lawlessness* would become recognizable. This does not mean, of course, that every Christian would immediately identify the Papacy as the Antichrist, but that the Papacy itself would emerge as the most important institution in a major segment of Christianity.

Revelation 17

Mystery Babylon

Although not in the majority, some scholars of prophecy interpret Babylon in Revelation as literal Babylon, a resurgence of power in the Near East that will play a prominent role in the end game. Undoubtedly, this is influenced by popular notions that literal Israel still has prophetic significance and perhaps by the political trouble-making of the ruthless Saddam Hussein in Iraq during the 1990s and early twenty-first century. However, there are at least two sound reasons for rejecting a literal interpretation of Babylon in the book of Revelation. First, the Old Testament predicted that literal Babylon would be destroyed and never rise again, according to Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50-51. On the basis of reports that Iraq had been in the process of rebuilding the old city of Babylon, in southern Iraq, some expositors declared that the prophecies of literal Babylon's destruction have not yet been fulfilled. But Isaiah 13:17 and Jeremiah 51:11, 28 all mention the Medes as God's instrument for destroying Babylon. Although the Medes did not totally obliterate the city, it is obvious that Babylon's destruction was to begin with the Medes, and that Babylon would never recover from that point onward. Indeed, its decline did begin with the Medes and Persians, who conquered it in 539 B.C. Before the end of the Middle Ages, the old city lay in ruins surrounded by desert, just as the prophecies had predicted. Therefore, since literal Babylon has been destroyed according to Bible prophecy, the Babylon of Revelation must be symbolic of another specific power.

Second, the word *mystery* is used to describe Babylon, according to Revelation 17:5. The Greek word for *mystery* has a particular usage meaning in the New Testament, where it normally represents a hidden truth which in New Testament times has now been revealed, especially to believers. See Matthew 13:11, Romans 11:25; 16:25, Ephesians 3:3; 5:32; 6:19, Colossians 1:27;

2:2; 4:3, II Thessalonians 2:7, and Revelation 1:20 for the use of this word in the New Testament. And if Babylon were literal Babylon, then it would never have been a mystery to anyone at any time. The inescapable conclusion, then, is that Babylon in Revelation is a symbolic name for another specific power.

Revelation 17:1-6 speaks of Babylon as a harlot woman. The large majority of references to a harlot in the Old Testament is to the professed people of God, who had gone spiritually astray seeking other *lovers*, a metaphor used in Isaiah 1:1, 21, Jeremiah 3:6-9, Ezekiel 16:1-3, 15-43; 20:30; 23:4, Hosea 1:2; 2:5; 3:1; 4:15; 5:3; 6:10; and 9:1. The implications for Babylon is that it is a symbol of God's professed church which has apostatized from much truth. We may rightfully call it the Antichurch in contrast to the faithful church of Jesus.

The Relationship of Babylon to the Antichrist

Many scholars of Bible prophecy recognize that Babylon represents a false religious organization, either outwardly Christian or not. Among them, some distinguish Babylon from the end-time Antichrist on the basis that the harlot in Revelation 17 is seen riding a beast, whose seventh head is obviously the end-time Antichrist. Because the symbolism distinguishes the two, they are viewed as separate entities. Babylon is then viewed as the false religion of the Antichrist, and the Antichrist himself as a political leader or power on the basis that the heads on the beast there represent political powers. However, a closer look at the chapter reveals that Babylon is also a political power in addition to its religious nature. Verse 18 calls this woman *that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth*. The literal Greek reads *that great city having a kingdom*. Clearly, if Babylon is also a city representing its own kingdom, then it must be both a religious organization and a political nation.

It is certainly correct to conclude that the seventh head is the end-time Antichrist because when *he comes, he must continue a short time* (v. 10), identified as the time when the 10 horns enforce the wishes of the beast (vv. 12-13) in persecuting Christ and His people (see v. 14) until they turn against the harlot by destroying her (vv. 16-17). But not much should be made of the fact that Babylon and the beast under the seventh head are distinguished in John's vision. Please note that during the time of this seventh head, it is said that the 10 horns *receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast...and they will give their power and authority to the beast* (vv. 12-13). Then when these horns change their minds, note that they turn against *the harlot...for God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled* (vv. 16-17). By sharing power and authority with the beast, they are doing so with the harlot, for it is she who is riding, and thereby directing, the actions of the symbolic beast and its horns. That is why the language in these verses has the 10 horns identified with the beast and the harlot, and why turning against the harlot (v. 16) is the same as turning against the beast (v. 17). Furthermore, according to Revelation 16:17-21 and 18:4, 8, the fall of

the harlot Babylon is also associated with the 7 Last Plagues at the Second Coming of Jesus (cf. Revelation 19:11-21 with 14:14-20), which means that any scenario that has an allegedly political Antichrist continuing to act even after the false religious system has been defeated must be wrong. Therefore, we are compelled to conclude that the Antichrist is the same power represented by the harlot and the seventh head of the beast, with the harlot especially representing the false religious aspect and the seventh head especially representing the political aspect of the same power.

The Relationship of the 7 Heads to the Antichrist

Revelation 17, like chapters 12 and 13, pictures a 7-headed, 10-horned beast. In chapter 12, the beast is a red dragon; in chapter 13, it is a sea beast; and here in chapter 17, it is a scarlet beast. However, only chapter 17 offers a complete explanation of the 7 heads. According to Revelation 17:9-10, the 7 heads are 7 mountains and 7 kings. This is so because the context clearly means that the 7 kings are also equal to the 7 heads just as are the 7 mountains, with the better Greek translation in verse 10 being *also [or "and"] seven kings are they*. Although many expositors translate the Greek word for *mountains* as *hills* in order to identify Babylon as Rome, the city on seven hills, the word primarily means *mountains*; there was another Greek word available to John for *hills*. Obviously, then, these are symbolic mountains since they are equivalent to the heads and kings. In Scripture, a mountain is used symbolically to represent a political nation or kingdom, as illustrated in Isaiah 2:2-3, Jeremiah 17:1-3; 31:23; 51:24-25, Ezekiel 17:22-23, and Daniel 2:44-45. And a king can also represent an entire kingdom, according to Daniel 2:37-39 and 7:17, 23. Therefore, the only way that these three symbols can be equivalent is to view them as representing kingdoms, in contrast to either hills or individual kings.

Revelation 17:10 indicates that they are sequential in nature because it states that *Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come*. Because all three beasts with the 7 heads in chapters 12, 13, and 17 are portrayed as persecuting powers, these 7 sequential heads must pertain to specific kingdoms in history which have been especially notorious for persecuting God's people. In other words, we reject the view that the 7 heads simply represent all human kingdoms which have persecuted God's people throughout history since 7 is the Biblical number of completion because the sequential nature of these 7 heads strongly suggests specific kingdoms.

But what is the specific identity of these 7 persecuting kingdoms? If the vision is viewed from John's own day, then the first 5 heads which had then already fallen must be (1) Egypt, (2) Assyria, (3) Babylon, (4) Medo-Persia, and (5) Greece because of their prominence in Biblical history as persecuting powers. That would make Rome the head which *is* (6th head), with the 7th head representing the end-time Antichrist.

However, there are two serious problems with this interpretation. First, it ignores the testimony of verse 10 that when the 7th head comes, *he must continue a short time*, making it parallel to the

period when the 10 horns are active at the very end-time (vv. 12-17). The Roman Empire has been defunct for more than 1,500 years. Yet the end-time Antichrist has not made its appearance, at least not for its *short time* of operation. Second, it ignores the relationship between the 7 heads and the entire beast. Please note that verse 8 describes the beast to which the heads are connected in terms of the past, present, and future (cf. v. 11). When this is correlated with the same three tenses used in connection with the 7 heads, the identification of the 7 heads in the previous paragraph does not make sense in light of history:

| <i>Verse 8</i> | <i>Verse 10</i> |
|----------------|--|
| PAST | <i>The beast...was... Five [kingdoms] have fallen</i> |
| PRESENT | <i>The beast...is not....one [kingdom] is</i> |
| FUTURE | <i>The beast...will ascend...the other [kingdom] has not yet come.</i> |

Interpreting Rome as the 6th head, *one is*, makes it equivalent to the period in which the entire beast *is not*. How was it that the Roman Empire in John's day *is* but that it also existed at the time the entire beast *is not*? This presents an insurmountable problem.

However, when the prophecy is viewed in light of the pre-wound and post-wound phases for the Antichrist discovered in Revelation 13, it harmonizes perfectly, albeit with a different power. From this perspective, the 6th head represents the era when the Antichrist is suffering the effects of its deadly wound. It still exists, it *is* but it *is not* actively engaged in its work of persecution. This interpretation is also confirmed by another piece of information. Revelation 17:8 states that the future, and final, work of the beast begins when it *will ascend out of the bottomless pit*. The Greek word for *bottomless pit* is the origin of the English word *abyss* and is sometimes associated with the realm of the dead, as in Romans 10:7. This strongly implies that the beast's move from the 6th head to the 7th head is tantamount to a resurrection, that is, its deadly wound was healed. Furthermore, there is an interesting parallel with Satan himself, who will be inactive during the millennium when he will be in the bottomless pit (or *abyss*; same Greek word), according to Revelation 20:1-3, 7ff. The time of the 6th head cannot actually be during the millennium, by the way, because the destruction of Babylon, which is inseparable from the scarlet beast in Revelation 17, will occur at the Second Coming of Jesus, not after the millennium. Specifically, references to islands and mountains fleeing or being moved out of their places in connection with the wrath of God (note especially 16:20; 6:14) place her destruction at the Second Coming.

The identification of the 6th head as that era when the Antichrist exists but is not actively engaged

in its persecuting work means that the Roman Empire cannot possibly be represented by that head because it was very much persecuting faithful Christians. Indeed, the apostle John himself was exiled to the island of Patmos *for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ* (Revelation 1:9). Furthermore, if the 7th head represents the end-time Antichrist and the 6th head represents the same power when it is not active, then the 5th head must represent the Antichrist before it received its deadly wound, for surely it must have existed prior to that wounding. In other words, the last three heads on the beast must represent the Antichrist in three of its different historical periods.

All this means that John's vision of the Antichrist was seen from the perspective of its inactive, or deadly wound, phase. This leaves just four heads to identify in history as particularly guilty of persecuting God's people before we reach the Antichrist's first phase of operations. And the clue for their identification, and thus to the Antichrist's, is found in the fact that this composite beast comes from the prophecy in Daniel 7. Taking Daniel 7 as our cue, the four political nations prior to the Antichrist must be (1) Babylon, (2) Medo-Persia, (3) Greece, and (4) Rome.

Before we identify the Antichrist, let us review what we have learned from Revelation 17 and add a bit more to our knowledge. We know that Babylon is both a religious organization and a political nation. From the sequence of the four kingdoms in the previous paragraph, we know that it arose from the ashes of Rome. This means that God's professed people can be unmistakably identified as Christian, confirming our tentative conclusion above that Babylon was specifically a professed Christian organization. Examining the description of the harlot in verses 1-6, we know that she is guilty of blasphemy (v. 3), which because she is a religious power, is the religious sin of claiming certain divine prerogatives, as in Matthew 9:2-3; 26:63-65, Luke 5:21, and John 10:33, 36, prerogatives which belong only to God. At least one of these prerogatives must be the claim of having the authority to exercise God's wrath against heretics in persecuting God's more faithful Christian believers (v. 6). Finally, as *the mother of harlots* (v. 5), she must have existed in history sufficiently long to produce daughter Christian churches before her deadly wound was inflicted on her. Remember that John sees her during the period when she is suffering the effects of her deadly wound. In other words, she can rightfully be considered a mother church.

Is there any entity clearly identifiable in history that matches these specifications to the letter? Indeed, there is one and only one that perfectly fits the description of Revelation 17: the Papal Church (Roman Catholic Church). It is certainly an avowed Christian Church whose Papal leader claims to officially represent the full authority of Jesus on earth and whose priests supposedly represent Jesus by forgiving people's sins. It has also been a political nation during most of its long history, including the present day. It arose in correct sequence from the ashes of the Roman Empire. It most certainly has a long history of persecuting those it has judged as being heretics. Finally, before its inactive phase began, it had already suffered through the Protestant Reformation, in which daughter churches were produced; to this day, it claims to be the mother church. No

other power on earth even comes close to fulfilling this prophecy.

Therefore, all 7 heads on the beast can now be listed as follows: (1) Babylon (or Neo-Babylonia); (2) Medo-Persia; (3) Greece; (4) Rome; (5) the Papacy (during its first, historical phase of persecution in the Middle Ages); (6) the Papacy during the effects of its deadly wound; and (7) the Papacy after its deadly wound is fully healed, during its second and final phase of persecuting work just before Jesus returns to rescue His people. Fortunately, the final phase of Papal persecution will last for only a short, unspecified time in contrast to the 1,260 years of persecution during the Middle Ages.

As we should expect, the teaching of Revelation 17 is in complete harmony with the teaching of Revelation 13 concerning the identification and work of the Antichrist.

Some have been confused by the reference in Revelation 17:11 to an 8th when the rest of the chapter only speaks of 7 heads: *And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.* First, a close inspection of verse 11 reveals that it does not actually say that there is an 8th head because there is no word for *head* in that verse. Second, the Greek word translated *eighth* here is masculine and therefore cannot be a *head* because the latter word is feminine in gender. Third, please note that the verse declares the entire beast itself to be an eighth and part of the seven. When you add seven numbers the total sum is the eighth number. Therefore, when this verse calls the entire beast an eighth, it is stating the truth that the sum and substance of the entire beast—representing persecuting powers throughout history—will be destroyed once and for all.

The 10 Horns

Plainly, as all agree, the 10 horns on the scarlet beast of Revelation 17 represent the international alliance that will give political support to the Antichrist in its end-time phase of persecution. Many scholars of different persuasions have interpreted the 10 horns in this same chapter to be European nations, viewing them as either 10 specific nations or as the number 10 representing the totality of European nations. Although the imagery is clearly borrowed from Daniel 7, whose 10 horns are associated with the beast representing the Roman Empire, pointing to the European division of that empire, the contextual picture in the book of Revelation as a whole reflects the teaching that every political nation on earth will give its support to the Antichrist at the end-time. Even Revelation 17:15 reflects this interpretation when it defines the *waters...where the harlot sits...as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.* It may well be that the 10 horns here represent a special international, or an exclusively European-based, confederation of 10 nations, in which case the *nations* of verse 15 would then refer to the great majority of the populations of all nations on earth. A specific identification of these 10 horns is not actually necessary, however, for it is clear that they represent some political coalition of nations or national leaders that will carry out the

directives of the Antichrist in persecuting the people of God just before the Second Coming of Jesus.