



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 42

Text: Rev. 17:8-18

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The Big Whore, pt. 2

Greek NT

8 Τὸ θηρίον ὃ εἶδες ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, καὶ θαυμασθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, βλεπόντων τὸ θηρίον ὅτι ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται. 9 ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν. Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσίν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν. καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσίν· 10 οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν, καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μέναι. 11 καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει. 12 Καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσιν, οἵτινες βασιλείαν οὐπω ἔλαβον, ἀλλ' ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεῖς μίαν ὥραν λαμβάνουσιν μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου. 13 οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσίαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ διδώσιν. 14 οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί.

La Biblia de las Américas

8 La bestia que viste, era y no es, y está para subir del abismo e ir a la destrucción. Y los moradores de la tierra, cuyos nombres no se han escrito en el libro de la vida desde la fundación del mundo, se asombrarán al ver la bestia que era y no es, y que vendrá. 9 Aquí está la mente que tiene sabiduría. Las siete cabezas son siete montes sobre los que se sienta la mujer; 10 y son siete reyes; cinco han caído, uno es y el otro aún no ha venido; y cuando venga, es necesario que permanezca un poco de tiempo. 11 Y la bestia que era y no es, es el octavo rey, y es uno de los siete y va a la destrucción. 12 Y los diez cuernos que viste son diez reyes que todavía no han recibido reino, pero que por una hora reciben autoridad como reyes con la bestia. 13 Estos tienen un mismo propósito, y entregarán su poder y autoridad a la bestia. 14 Estos pelearán contra el Cordero, y el Cordero los vencerá, porque El es Señor de señores y Rey de reyes, y los que están con El son llamados, escogidos y fieles. 15 Y me dijo: Las aguas que viste donde se sienta la ramera, son pueblos, multi-

NRSV

8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. 9 "This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, 10 of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; 14 they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

NLT

8 The beast you saw was alive but isn't now. And yet he will soon come up out of the bottomless pit and go to eternal destruction. And the people who belong to this world, whose names were not written in the Book of Life from before the world began, will be amazed at the reappearance of this beast who had died. 9 "And now understand this: The seven heads of the beast represent the seven hills of the city where this woman rules. They also represent seven kings. 10 Five kings have already fallen, the sixth now reigns, and the seventh is yet to come, but his reign will be brief. 11 The scarlet beast that was alive and then died is the eighth king. He is like the other seven, and he, too, will go to his doom. 12 His ten horns are ten kings who have not yet risen to power; they will be appointed to their kingdoms for one brief moment to reign with the beast. 13 They will all agree to give their power and authority to him. 14 Together they will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them because he is Lord

15 Καὶ λέγει μοι· τὰ ὕδατα ἃ εἶδες οὗ ἡ πόρνη κάθηται, λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλώσσαι. 16 καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες καὶ τὸ θηρίον οὗτοι μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην καὶ ἠρημωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτὴν καὶ γυμνὴν καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται καὶ αὐτὴν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρὶ. 17 ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἔδωκεν εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ καὶ ποιῆσαι μίαν γνώμην καὶ δοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ ἄχρι τελεσθῆσονται οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ. 18 καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἣν εἶδες ἔστιν ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη ἣ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

tudes, naciones y lenguas. 16 Y los diez cuernos que viste y la bestia, éstos odiarán a la ramera y la dejarán desolada y desnuda, y comerán sus carnes y la quemarán con fuego; 17 porque Dios ha puesto en sus corazones el ejecutar su propósito: que tengan ellos un propósito unánime, y den su reino a la bestia hasta que las palabras de Dios se cumplan. 18 Y la mujer que viste es la gran ciudad, que reina sobre los reyes de la tierra.

15 And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

over all lords and King over all kings, and his people are the called and chosen and faithful ones."

15 And the angel said to me, "The waters where the prostitute is sitting represent masses of people of every nation and language. 16 The scarlet beast and his ten horns -- which represent ten kings who will reign with him -- all hate the prostitute. They will strip her naked, eat her flesh, and burn her remains with fire. 17 For God has put a plan into their minds, a plan that will carry out his purposes. They will mutually agree to give their authority to the scarlet beast, and so the words of God will be fulfilled. 18 And this woman you saw in your vision represents the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

ANGELIC INTERPRETATION:

INTRODUCTION

In 17:1-7, John gives us a rather detailed depiction of the city that he labels as the big whore. Quite a number of appearance details are then provided first in vv. 1-6 derived out of the image of the city as a prostitute. They are rather overwhelming to John as he puts into writing what angel showed him from the perspective of the desert. Then in v. 7 the angel responds with the assertion that he will explain the symbolical meaning of the woman and the beast. We should note that he doesn't promise John to explain every detail. In fact, his statement in v. 7 indicates that his explanation will only focus on one or two central traits. And parts of his explanation that follows introduces completely new ideas not previously hinted at in what John saw.

Verses 8-18 they provide the explanation of the angel in two distinct parts of vv. 8-14 and 15-18. When we read the contents, however, it becomes clear that his explanation centers actually on the beast and his horns / heads. The woman receives explanation in passing only in v. 18. But this shouldn't concern us too much because the woman as the city will receive consider-

able attention in 18:1-19:10.

The nature of the angelic explanation in vv. 8-18 is allegorical in form. By definition, this means an arbitrary symbolical value or meaning is attached to the description of something or someone. Usually no logical connection between the item and its symbolical meaning exists. The linkage is made purely arbitrary by the one doing the interpretation, in this case here, an angel.

What this text gives us beyond the content of the depiction of the city is a clear example of 'apocalyptic thinking' inside the book of Revelation. From the methodology presented here we can glean more clearly how this way of thinking moved in ancient Jewish circles including early Jewish Christian patterns. A question may arise as to whether such patterns continue in our modern western world. The resounding answer is NO! First and foremost, modern western individuals are utterly incapable of thinking apocalyptically as what began with the eighth century OT prophets and was fleshed out in the Jewish apocalyptic writings of the intertestamental period. By the end of the second century both

in Judaism and in Christianity this manner of thinking had vanished completely and has never resurfaced since. And even among traditionalist minded Jews of the century before and after Christ such thinking was viewed with great suspicion and often considered to be heretical to Judaism. Christians in the first four centuries even wrestled greatly with the legitimacy of this kind of thinking which caused Revelation itself to be among the last books of the NT to gain canonical status across Christian circles generally. And in Syriac speaking Christianity it never found acceptance even to this very day. The enormous cultural conditioning of our ways of thinking from the times of the Enlightenment followed by the Age of Reason has so 'brain washed' our minds that we find it almost impossible to understand such ancient ways of thinking, much less be able to reproduce it. In the Greek and Roman ways of thinking from before the beginning of Christianity onward, such patterns do not exist. As Christianity became virtually non-Jewish during the second century AD, and was immersed in the surrounding Greco-Roman culture of the time, it struggled with the book of Revelation and its apocalyptic thinking. Often gross misinterpretations of the document were made in a few places that then raised further questions about the legitimacy of this kind of thinking in many circles during the period of the church fathers. Add to this the very clumsy and futile attempts to reproduce apocalyptic thinking in most of the NT Apocrypha documents that try to imitate the book of Revelation and one can see why such thinking is not possible outside of the small circle beginning with the OT prophets and ending with the apost John.

Our challenge is to take advantage of the rare glimpses into methodology inside Revelation as to how this kind of thinking works. Passages like chapter seventeen can help us adjust our interpretive approaches to make sure that these are 'on target' rather than getting side tracked by influences from our own culture. So let's see what we can learn from the angel's interpretation of the woman and the beast in vv. 8-18.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

The apocalyptic nature of this text limits the historical aspects severely, but the literary dimensions remain important to the interpretation.

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this text, only one variation merits listing in *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev ed) text apparatus:

Verse eight: ὑπάγει, he goes¹:

¹{B} ὑπάγει (see 17.11) A 1611 2053 2062 syr^{ph} cop^{sa, (bo)} eth Irenaeus^{lat} Hippoly-



The alternative is the infinitive form of the same verb ὑπάγειν.² The evidence slightly favors the verb spelling, although the meaning remains the same which ever reading is adopted.

However several variations exist across the fuller spectrum of all the available manuscripts on this text. The text apparatus of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (N-A 28th rev ed) lists some 22 places.³ A careful exam-

tus Andrew; Primasius // ὑπάγειν κ 051 205 209 1006 1841 1854 2030 2329 2344^{vid} Byz [P 046] it^{ar, sig} vg syr^h arm Hippolytus^{mss}; Quodvultdeus Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).

²“Instead of the present indicative verb ὑπάγει, some manuscripts have the infinitive form ὑπάγειν (to go). In Greek manuscripts, final ν is often represented merely by a horizontal stroke over the preceding letter, so the difference in spelling between ὑπάγει and ὑπάγειν was very slight. In this context, the present indicative is the more difficult reading, which copyists would have tended to change to the infinitive after μέλλει (be about to). The variant has little significance as far as the meaning. The indicative states that the beast is going to destruction, while the infinitive states what he is about to do.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 544.]

³8

* υπαγειν κ P 046. 051. 1006. 1841. 1854. 2030. 2329. 2344 M syh; Bea (The infinitive ὑπάγειν replaces the verb ὑπάγει)

| txt A 1611. 2053. 2062 syph sa (bo); Irlat Prim

* θαυμασονται κ 046. 051. 1006. 1841. 1854. 2030. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2344 M (alternative spelling for θαυμασθήσονται)

| txt A P 1611

* την γην 046. 2030 M^K (replaces ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)

* τα ονοματα κ P 051. 2329. 2344 M^A lat sy^{ph} sa^{mss} (alternative spelling for τὸ ὄνομα)

*1 ἐπι του βιβλιου 046. 2030 M^K (alternative spelling for ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον)

| εν τω βιβλιω 1006. 1841. 2329

2 και παλιν παρεσται κ (και παρέσται is replaced)

| και (+ οτι 1854) παρεστιν κ2 1854 M^A

11

° κ ar vgms (και after ἐστιν is omitted)

* ουτος κ 046. 1006. 1841. 2030 M^K sy^h (αὐτός is replaced)

* ο κ (οὗτός is inserted after αὐτός)

12

* ουκ A vg^{mss} (οὐπω is replaced)

13

* την κ P 051. 1611. 1854. 2053. 2062 M^A (article inserted before ἐξουσιαν)

15

* ειπεν A vg (λέγει is replaced)

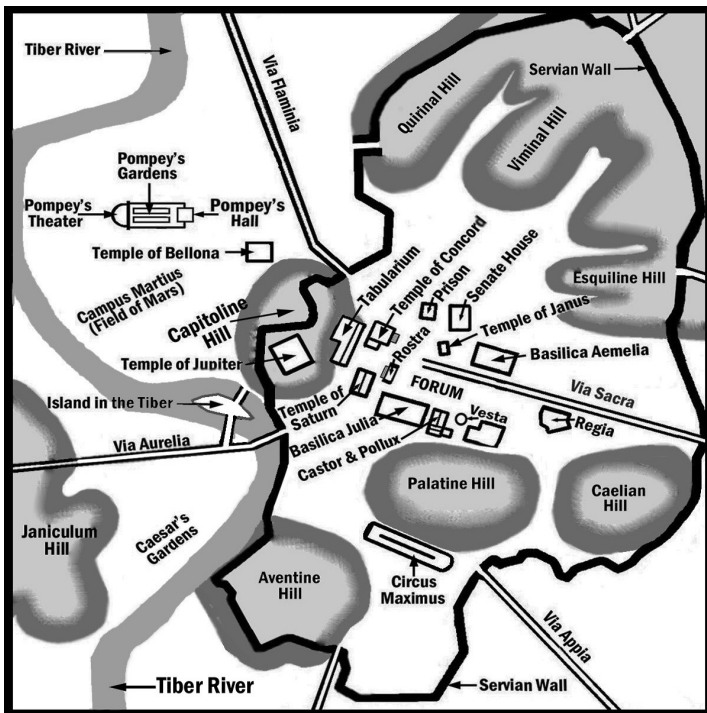
* ταυτα κ* 1854. 2329; Bea (τὰ ὕδατα is replaced)

| ταυτα τα υδατα κ²

* και κ (και is inserted before λαοι)

16

* και γυμνην ποιησουσιν αυτην 046c. 051. 2030 M^K (και



serted by λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι, *peoples and crowds exist and nations and tongues* (v. 15).

Interestingly from 71AD a Roman coin was authorized by Emperor Vespasian (69-79 AD), the father of Domitian who ruled at the end of the century. The



static depiction⁴ here in Revelation reminds one of an Ekphrasis,⁵ which is a detailed description usually of

⁴By static is meant non-moving or animated descriptions. Animated depictions of images and symbols are the dominate pattern inside Revelation. Static depictions are very unusual.

The scene described in Rev 17 is very probably static because the framework for the vision in Rev 17 is an ekphrasis or description of an ancient work of propagandistic Roman art very similar, if not identical, to that depicted on the sestertius (see below). Though the original (or originals, since it probably existed in many generic variants) is no longer extant, representations of it apparently survive only on the reverse of the sestertius minted in A.D. 71 during the reign of Vespasian. The work of art itself, which may have been a marble or bronze relief, was dominated by the seated figure of Dea Roma, the goddess who personified Rome for the Greek world.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 920–921.]

⁵“Rev 17 constitutes an ekphrasis, or ‘detailed description [of a work of art],’ a literary form that often occurs as a digression within a literary narrative. Ekphraseis were not discussed by rhetorical theorists until the first or second century A.D., when the ekphrasis was included in the basic rhetorical exercises called progymnasmata (Theon Progym. 11 [Spengel, *Rhetores* 2:118–20]; Hermogenes Progym. 10 [Spengel, *Rhetores* 2:16–17]; Aphthonius Progym. 12 [Spengel, *Rhetores* 2:46–49]; Nicolaus Progym. 12 [Spengel, *Rhetores* 3:491–93]; on ekphraseis in the rhetoricians, cf. Palm, “Bemerkungen,” 108–15). The term ἔκφρασις, ‘description,’ itself is not regularly used of this rhetorical and literary form until the Second Sophistic; the only two uses of the term previously are found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Δεῖματιαιονε* fr. 6.3.2 and *Ἀρχή ρητορικῆ* 10.17 (Bartsch, *Decoding*, 8). Theon defines ekphrasis as ‘a descriptive account bringing what is illustrated vividly before one’s sight’ (Progym. 11; Spengel, *Rhetores* 2:118; tr. Bartsch, *Decoding*, 9). Theon later observes, ‘the virtues of ekphrasis are in particular clarity and vividness, such that one can almost see the things narrated’ (Spengel, *Rhetores* 2:119; tr. Bartsch, *Decoding*, 111). Nicolaus suggests that ‘ekphrasis undertakes to fashion spectators out of auditors’ (Spengel, *Rhetores* 3:491; tr. Bartsch, *Decoding*, 111). Though ekphrasis is commonly defined as ‘the rhetorical description of a work of art’ (OCD, 377), which is certainly appropriate for our hypothesis about Rev 17, such a definition is unduly restrictive, for the rhetorical handbooks listing the topics appropriate for ekphraseis include persons, circum-

ination of each of the places reflects scribal attempts to improve the style of the Greek and in a couple of places just carelessness in copying.

This passage is stable in the wording of the text and the adopted reading can be exegeted in full confidence that it was the original wording.

Internal History. The depiction of the heads and horns of the beast clearly allude to the city of Rome with some of its physical characteristics. The interpretive assertion of the angel that Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν, *the seven heads equal seven hills* (v. 9), clearly alludes to the seven hills that made up the heart of the ancient city of Rome. The Tiber River, which flows through the city, evidently plays a connection to τὰ ὕδατα ἃ εἶδες οὗ ἡ πόρνη κάθηται, *the waters which you saw where the whore sits* (v. 15). By the end of the first century the population of Rome was truly multicultural with representatives of virtually every ethnic group in the whole of the empire living in the city, as further as-

γυμνήν is replaced)

‡ – 046* M^A

‡ txt & A P 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2329

° & P 046 (preposition ἐν is omitted)

17

* αὐτων κ² 2329 (alternative spelling for αὐτοῦ)

* A 2329 latt (καὶ ποιῆσαι μίαν γνώμην is omitted)

* αὐτω A 1854* (alternative spellings for αὐτῶν)

‡ αὐτου 046. 1854^c

*¹ τελεσθῶσιν 046. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2030 M^K (alternative spelling for τελεσθήσονται)

18

* βασιλειων κ bo^{mss} (alternative spelling for βασιλέων)

* ἐπι 046c. 2030 M^K (preposition inserted in front of τῆς γῆς)

[Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 773–774.]

stances, places, periods of time, customs, festivals, assemblies, statues, and paintings (Bartsch, *Decoding*, 10–14, esp. 12–13 n. 12, where a classified list of ekphraseis found in the Greek novels is given). Εκπρασσεις were used very elaborately in Greek literature long before they became the subject for rhetorical discussion. The first literary ekphraseis occur in Homer (the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18.478–608; the cup of Nestor in *Iliad* 11.632–35), and these became models for later authors. Many ekphraseis are detailed descriptions of works of art, such as magnificent garments or decorated shields (e.g., the mantle of Jason in Apollonius Rhodius *Αργοναυτικά* 1.721–67, the shield of Dionysus in Nonnus *Διονυσιακά* 25.380–567, and the shield of Eurypylos in Quintus Smyrn. *Ποσθημερικά* 6.196–293), or places such as palaces, gardens, harbors, and caves (e.g., the palace and garden of Alkinoos in *Odyssey* 7.84–132, the palace of Aeëtes in Apollonius Rhodius *Αργοναυτικά* 3.213–48, and the cave of the nymphs in Quintus Smyrn. *Ποσθημερικά* 6.471–92).

“The ekphrasis was eventually transformed from a constituent literary form used as a digression in narrative passages into an independent literary form, evident in such literary works as the *Imagines*, ‘Paintings,’ of Philostratus Major, the *Imagines* of Philostratus Minor, *Κεβες Ταβύλα*, and Callistratus *Σταυραρυμ δεσχηριπιονες* (late third century A.D.). In the Roman period ekphrasis became a relatively popular literary form. By the second century A.D., descriptions of paintings were frequently used to introduce entire compositions or large sections of compositions (M. C. Mittelstadt, “Longus: Daphnis and Chloe and Roman Narrative Painting,” *Λατομύς* 26 [1967] 757 n. 1). A painting depicting the story of Europa and the bull (closely corresponding to similar scenes on coins from Phoenician Sidon) is described at the beginning of Achilles Tatius *Λευχιππε ανδ Χλιτοπιον* 1.1–2, and later the author describes paintings of Perseus and Andromeda (3.6–7) and Prometheus (3.8); for a comprehensive approach to ekphrasis in the novels, see Bartsch, *Decoding*. One influential work, the *Ταβύλα* of Cebes (first century A.D.), consists of a lengthy discussion of the contents and significance of a picture on a votive tablet in a temple; the work is essentially a discussion of popular morality. The *Ταβύλα* is a dialogical ekphrasis in which a group of visitors to a temple see a votive tablet with a picture on it they cannot understand; i.e., they are confused about its meaning. An old man offers to explain the meaning of the picture and provides a moralizing allegorical explanation for the various figures, making frequent use of the demonstrative pronouns οὗτος, ‘this,’ and ἐκεῖνος, ‘that,’ and the interrogative pronouns τίς, ‘who,’ and τί, ‘what,’ in the explanations, a stylistic feature characteristic of many Jewish apocalypses. There is a close relationship between the literary form exhibited in the *Ταβύλα* and that found in *Rev* 17. Both are descriptions of works of art, and both find allegorical significance in the details of the picture.

“By the time of the Second Sophistic (second century A.D.), there were two major approaches to the use of ekphrasis in ancient literature. One approach centers on the necessity of understanding and interpreting the work itself. The other (found in Cebes and Lucian) focuses on the hidden meanings conveyed by the picture or work of art, which are usually uncovered through an allegorical mode of interpretation (Bartsch, *Decoding*, 22–31). There are two types of such allegorical descriptions: those whose meaning is obvious (as in Lucian *Δε μερχεδε χονδ*. 42 [in which the *Ταβύλα* of Cebes is specifically mentioned] and *Χαλυμνιαε* 4–5) and those whose meaning must be carefully explained (Lucian *Hercules*; Cebes *Ταβύλα*). In the last two compositions, the narrator is puzzled over the meaning of the representation, not unlike the surprise and

a work of art often showing up in literary texts as an explanatory digression. The reverse side of the coin on the right side depicts the goddess Roma sitting on the seven hills with the Tiber flowing around her feet. She symbolized the city of Rome. What John provides in *17:8-18* is largely in the literal style of the ancient ekphrasis. And a significant portion relates parts of the visual picture he saw to major defining traits of the ancient city of Rome, just as the Roman coin does.

Literary Aspects:

Again the literary traits play the more important role in *17:8-18*, since they help shape the interpretive perspective of the passage.

Genre: The broad genre of apocalyptic vision remains the controlling literary form of chapter seventeen. This means we are viewing spiritual reality through the median of visual images being described by the words of the text. We are not looking at history, although the images of earthly beings are taken from human life experiences, such as lions etc. After John saw the vision, he had to turn to terms, concepts out of human experience in order to put into writing what he had seen. Otherwise, we would not be able to comprehend anything that he might write.

Inside the apocalyptic vision literary form, John makes special use of a literary pattern that had existed for a long time in the ancient world, and was just becoming popular among Latin writers in the first Christian century. That form is labeled *Ecphrasis* from the Greek term ἔκφρασις.⁶ Derived from the Greek verb ἐκφράζω which means ‘to describe,’⁷ the idea is a nar-

wonder expressed by John in *Rev* 17:6b over what he has just seen in *17:3-6a*. “Though ekphraseis occur much less frequently in the OT than in Greek literature (literary descriptions of impressive buildings and works of art are, of course, found throughout the ancient world and are not originally related to similar phenomena in Greek tradition), the OT does contain detailed descriptions of the temple (1 Kgs 6:14–36; 7:15–50) and of Solomon’s palace (1 Kgs 7:2–12); Josephus expanded and embellished both in *Ant.* 8.63–98; 8.133–40. Ekphraseis become relatively common only in Jewish apocalyptic literature, where the detailed description of metaphorical visions plays a very significant role (Downey, *RAC* 4 [1959] 932).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 923–924.

⁶ἔκφρασις, εως, ἦ, *description*, D.H.Rh.10.17 (pl.), *Luc.Hist. Conscr.*20, *Hermog.Prog.*10, *Apth.Prog.*12, etc.; title of works descriptive of works of art, as that of Callistratus.

[Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 526.]

⁷ἔκφράζω, *tell over; recount*, A.Pr.950, dub.1. in E.HF1119; denote, δύναμιν τοῖς τῶν θεῶν ὀνόμασιν *Plu.*2.24a.

II. *describe*, *Hermog.Prog.*10, *Id.*2.4, *Men.Rh.*p.373 S.:—*Pass.*, *Theon Prog.*2.

2. *express ornately*, τὸ ἐ. τὰ γέλοια ὁμοίον ἐστι καὶ καλλωπίζειν *πίθηκον Demetr.*Eloc.165.

rated description of a static work of art of some kind. Not only a visual description of the item is included, but often it includes a reflection of its perceived meaning particularly at the symbolic level below the physical appearance of the object.⁸



Revelation seventeen, primarily verses 1-14, fits the essential qualities of this literary pattern as practiced in the world of John.⁹ In the seventh bowl of wrath the target is the city of 'Babylon' (16:17-21). Then in chapter seventeen something like an 'excursus' is appended to this and contains a depiction of this city around the image of a whore sitting on the first beast of chapter thirteen (vv. 1-10). But in the depiction of chapter seventeen the distinction between the city and the beast is minimized substantially. It's almost as though John had one of the Vespasian coins in front of him and was describing the reverse side, with implication that the 'beast' was pictured on the front side with the image of the Roman emperor. And yet some elements of John's picture go beyond the Roman coin and reflect additional use of images and ideas out of the Old Testament, such as Jer. 51, e.g., the cup (v. 4b).¹⁰

[Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 526.]

⁸Interestingly, in doing background checking on the term, I came across a [blog](#) from a student at McGill University who is doing a master's thesis on ekphrasis and communication.

⁹"Vision reports in apocalyptic literature characteristically contain lengthy detailed descriptions of the highly symbolic dreams or visions that the apocalyptist has purportedly experienced, together with their decoded meaning. Frequently the apocalyptist is accompanied by an angelic guide with whom he carries on a dialogue, with the apocalyptist asking simple-minded questions and the angelus interpres providing profound answers. Revelation departs from this literary pattern, for the apocalyptist never asks the meaning of anything he sees, though occasionally meanings are volunteered by supernatural revealers (1:20; 7:13-14), or the author-editor glosses the text with meanings and definitions of his own (4:5; 5:6, 8; 11:4; 14:4; 17:4; 20:5, 14)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 919.]

¹⁰One might wonder why John incorporated this highly distinctive literary form into Revelation. He gives no hint as to his reason. But one thing that has continually impressed me through this entire study of Revelation, especially with the wide variety of literary forms in the document: John was a very sensitive writer to the better ways of communicating ideas that were current in his day both from the Jewish and the Greco-Roman sources. His

Beyond ekphrasis, an additional literary pattern dominates vv. 8-18. What the angel uses to 'show' John the mystery of the woman and the beast is labeled in modern times 'allegorical' interpretation. The use of this method was common in ekphrasis writings where the meaning of the object being described was hidden or obscure to the reader.¹¹

Allegorical interpretation of ancient texts was common from the time of the classical philosophers onward. It arose primarily in Alexandria, Egypt, as a means to find contemporary relevancy in the writings of Homer some six centuries earlier. The linguistic principle behind this, however questionable, was that written expression possesses multiple levels of meaning beginning with the surface level meaning signaled by the grammar and syntax used by the writer. This was the meaning intended by him for his initial readers in his day. But below the surface level one could find additional layers of meaning, if he possessed the proper key to unlocking those levels of meaning. For the Greeks that key could only be possessed by the supremely educated individuals in society.¹² What one finds however is that the deeper meaning of a text is given an arbitrary meaning with little or no connection to the surface level meaning. The 'scholarly' interpreter simply says "this equals that" and little or no logical or perceivable connection exists between the two. Things Christianity had not isolated him into a world cut off from trends and methods widely used in his day far outside his Christian circles. He was cognant of these methods and freely adopted aspects from all of them in order to better persuade his readers to remain hopeful and confident in God. There is a real lesson to be learned from his example.

¹¹"By the time of the Second Sophistic (second century A.D.), there were two major approaches to the use of ekphrasis in ancient literature. One approach centers on the necessity of understanding and interpreting the work itself. The other (found in Cebes and Lucian) focuses on the hidden meanings conveyed by the picture or work of art, which are usually uncovered through an allegorical mode of interpretation (Bartsch, *Decoding*, 22-31). There are two types of such allegorical descriptions: those whose meaning is obvious (as in Lucian *Δε μερχεθε χονδ*. 42 [in which the *Ταβυλα* of Cebes is specifically mentioned] and *Χαλμυνιαε* 4-5) and those whose meaning must be carefully explained (Lucian *Hercules*; Cebes *Ταβυλα*). In the last two compositions, the narrator is puzzled over the meaning of the representation, not unlike the surprise and wonder expressed by John in Rev 17:6b over what he has just seen in 17:3-6a." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 924.]

¹²To be clear, most linguistic theories of communication are universally convinced of multiple levels of meaning in a written or verbal expression. But the determination of these sub-levels of meaning are derived not arbitrarily but instead by using fundamental principles of linguistics that see fundamental inner connections between all the layers of meaning in expressions. The clearest way to sense this is to think about synonyms. For synonyms to exist in a language there has to be a common sub-level of meaning which is behind the surface level meaning of both words.

got interesting when another 'scholar' declared from the same text "This is not that, but a different that." In the debates that followed Greek oratory and rhetoric took over and the one who could make the most persuasive case for his 'that' won the debate.

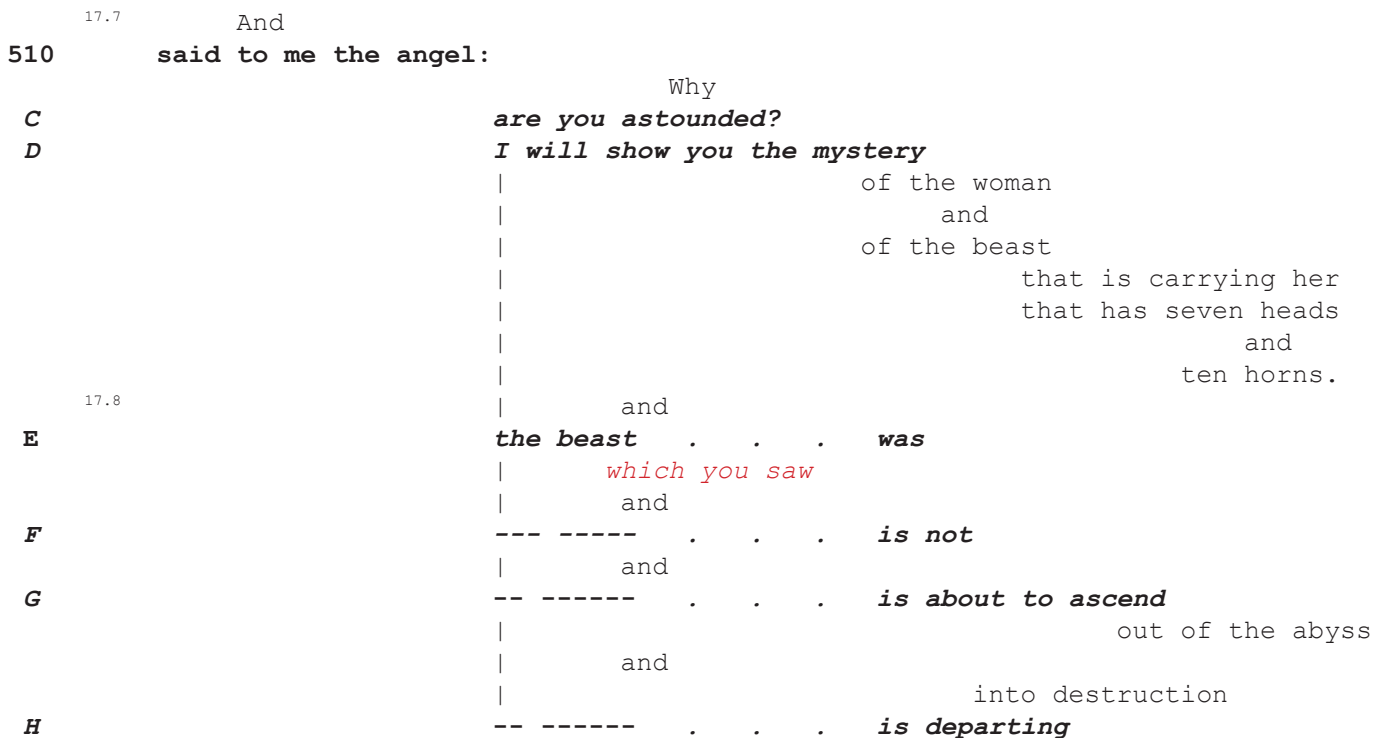
This way of interpreting writings found its way into intertestamental Hellenistic Judaism, with the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo as the extreme example in the first century BCE. The NT writers, however, make very limited use of this pattern, with the primary example by Paul in Galatians four in his allegory of Hagar and Sarah. But later Christianity adopted this approach massively, although it was condemned by church fathers in the Syriac regions of Antioch and Damascus. Augustine's adoption of with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) provides an easy to understand illustration of how far afield this could take the interpreter. In his view, the inn was the Roman Catholic Church, the Good Samaritan was Christ, and the Samaritan was the lost sinner. The priest and the Levite were different segments of the Jewish people who had no concern for sinners. Thus the parable had no connection to its literary context of Jesus illustrating proper love for one's in its setting in the Gospel of Luke. Instead, it was a call for the RC Church to take in the sinners that Christ brought to them for healing by the Church. The arbitrary equating of items in the parable to items in his day four centuries later had no logical basis and gave no value to the surface level meaning of Jesus' parable.

Inside the NT Paul's allegory in Galatians 4 and the angelic interpretation in Rev. 17:8-18 are about

the only texts with this method used at all. Yet as we will see in the interpretation given by the angel logical connections coming either out of the culture of John's world and/or from selected OT texts stand behind the links asserted by the angel to the beast and the woman. So this is not 'full blown' allegorical interpretation, as practiced later on in Christianity.

Literary Setting: The literary setting for 17:8-18 is relatively easy to discern. The connecting link between vv. 8-18 and vv. 1-6 is verse seven where the angel indicates his intention to show John what the two images in vv. 1-7 really mean in vv. 8-18. Beyond that chapter seventeen stands as an elaboration of more detailed meaning contained in the seventh bowl of wrath in 16:17-21, which itself is linked to the preceding two bowls of wrath in the fifth and sixth in 16:10-16. On the other side of 17:8-18, the final verse in 17:8 provides only a brief interpretation of the woman but also functions to set up the much more detailed depiction of her in 18:1-19:10. But this depiction shifts back to the standard apocalyptic visionary pattern rather than continuing to use the ecphrasis pattern in chapter seventeen. In this subsequent depiction the dynamic action orientation dominates John's description of the destruction of the woman. Thus 17:8-18 stands in some ways as a center point for our understanding of the beast and the woman as symbols of spiritual reality.

Literary Structure: The block diagram below presents the internal organization of primary and secondary ideas and how the writer moves from one to the next through the passage.



Y 17.14 | against the Lamb
these ... will make war
 | and
 Z **the Lamb will be victorious over them**
 because He is Lord of lords
 | and
 | King of kings
 | and
 those with Him are called
 and
 chosen
 and
 faithful.

17.15 And
 511 He says to me:
 AA **the waters . . . are peoples**
 | *which you saw* and
 | **crowds**
 | and
 | **nations**
 | and
 | **tongues.**
 17.16 | And
 | the ten horns
 || which you saw
 || and
 | the beast
 AB **these hate the whore**
 | and
 AC **they make her a waste land**
 | and
the woman
 | and
 AD **her flesh they devour**
 | and
 AE **they burn her up**
 | with fire.
 17.17 | For
 AF **God granted** _
 | into | their hearts
 | **to carry out His purpose**
 | and
 | **to make it one purpose**
 | and
 | **to give their kingdoms to the beast**
 | until the words of God will be completed.
 17.18 | And
 AG **the woman . . . is the city**
 | *which you saw* the great
 | which has a kingdom
 | over the kings of the earth.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure

Clearly verse 7 (#s510C-D) sets up the unit in anticipation of the angel's explanation that follows in vv. 8-18. Verse seven was treated in the preceding study and thus will not be treated here in the exegesis.

As becomes very clear in the diagram vv. 8-18, the angel's explanation, divides into two sections: discourse statements #s E - Z, and #s 511 AA-AG.

The first section, #s E-Z focus upon the beast and

certain traits that he possesses. This subunit is divided into two sections by the formula marker ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν, discourse statement J, introducing the second sub section. The first unit in discourse statements E through I stresses the supernatural quality of the beast in a mocking manner. The second subunit, discourse statements J through Z provide the allegorical interpretation of the seven heads and ten horns on the beast. This is all the interpretation of the beast that is provided.

The second section centers on the hatred of the woman by the beast and the kings, discourse statements AA through AF. In the final statement, AG, the identity of the woman is provided by the angel. This statement functions to bring the angel's explanation to a climax, and also to introduce the following depiction of her destruction in 18:1-19:10.

From the highly selective explanation of both the beast, and especially of the women, we catch a glimpse of those traits of both that are of greatest concern spiritually in these two creatures.

Exegesis of the Text:

From the above analysis of the diagram, it becomes clear that vv. 8-18 divides into two sections of material that then becomes the outline for the exegesis of the text. And also each of these two divisions contains two subunits of material. This then forms the outline structure for our exegesis. Since verse seven has already been treated in the preceding study, it will not be treated in detail here. Only the explanation of the angel in vv. 8-18 will concern us.

A. The angel's explanation, part one, vv. 8-14.

8 Τὸ θηρίον ὃ εἶδες ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, καὶ θαυμασθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, βλεπόντων τὸ θηρίον ὅτι ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέστα.

9 ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν. Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν. καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν. 10 οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν, καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μέναι. 11 καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδος ἔστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἔστιν, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει. 12 Καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσιν, οἵτινες βασιλείαν οὐπω ἔλαβον, ἀλλ' ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεῖς μίαν ὥραν λαμβάνουσιν μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου. 13 οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσίαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ διδῶσιν. 14 οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἔστιν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ

πιστοί.

8 The beast **that you saw** was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

9 "This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, 10 of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. 12 And the ten horns **that you saw** are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; 14 they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

This first division centers on explaining the important aspects of the beast. Remember that this is the first beast that surfaced initially in 13:1-4.



13.1 Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον, ἔχον κέρατα δέκα καὶ κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κεράτων αὐτοῦ δέκα διαδήματα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ὀνόματα βλασφημίας. 2 καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ εἶδον ἦν ὅμοιον παρδάλει καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὡς ἄρκου καὶ τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ ὡς στόμα λέοντος. καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ δράκων τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην. 3 καὶ μίαν ἐκ τῶν κεφαλῶν αὐτοῦ ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον, καὶ ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἔθεραπεύθη.

13 1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were blasphemous names, and on its heads were blasphemous names. 2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and

its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. 4 They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, καὶ θαυμασθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, βλεπόντων τὸ θηρίον ὅτι ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

This first trait to be explained is the first of three instances of this depiction:¹³

Rev 17:8a	Rev 17:8b	Rev 17:11a
τὸ θηρίον ... The beast ... ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν was and is not καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν and will ascend ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ from the abyss and εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει goes to destruction	τὸ θηρίον ... The beast ... ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν was and is not καὶ παρέσται and will be present	τὸ θηρίον ... The beast ... ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ... was and is not ... καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει and goes to destruction

Interestingly this threefold depiction of the beast is not found elsewhere in Revelation. Also it is formulated as a parody of his reference to God:

Rev. 1:4,	ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος He who is and who was and who is coming
Rev. 1:8,	κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος Lord God who is and who was and who is coming
Rev. 4:8	ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος He who was and who is and who is coming. ¹⁴

¹³David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 939.

¹⁴“The threefold varied repetition of this formula within the immediate context is striking, not least because it is not used of the beast elsewhere in Revelation. This formulation is designed by the author as a parody of his predication of God as ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ‘the One who is and who was and who is coming’ (1:4, 8), or ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ‘The One who was and who is and who is the coming One’ (4:8), where ὁ ἦν, ‘who was,’ and ὁ ὢν, ‘who is,’ are reversed, as in 17:8 (in 11:17 and 16:5 a bipartite formula occurs in the same order as the longer formula in 1:4, 8: ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν); see Comment on 1:4. The emphasis on God as ‘the One who comes’ (1:4, 8; 4:8) refers to the eschatological ‘visitation’ of God, and so the beast who ‘is about to ascend from the abyss and go to destruction’ also refers to the ‘coming’ and ‘going’ of the one playing this eschatological role. Here in 17:8, ‘was’ and ‘is not’ really mean ‘who lived’ and ‘who no longer lives [i.e., ‘is dead’],’ reflecting an epitaph used widely in the ancient world: ‘I was not, I became, I am not’ (ὄστις οὐκ ἦμην καὶ ἐγενόμην, οὐκ εἰμί; Lattimore, *Επιταφίς*, 76, 84–85). For the formula and its variants, cf. F. Cumont, ‘*Non fui, fui, non sum*,’ *Musée Belge* 32 (1928) 73–85. The formula occurs frequently in Latin epitaphs, e.g., *non fui, fui, non sum, non desidero*, ‘I was not, I was, I am not, I do not care’ (Lattimore, *Epitaphs*, 84), and occurs also on Greek epitaphs: οὐκ ἦμην, ἐγενόμην, ἦμην, οὐκ εἰμί· τοσαῦτα, ‘I was not, I was born, I was, I am not; so much for that.’ If this parody is to have any



Inside Revelation two beasts are mentioned 39 times, with this first beast receiving the greatest attention. The other beast is the second beast who emerges out of a pit in the earth to serve as the PR agent of the first beast (13:11-18). Later on in 16:13, he will be labeled the false prophet. Very likely the first beast in Revelation should be linked to the antichrist(s) mentioned elsewhere in the NT (1 Jhn 2:18-29; 4:1-6; 2 John 7-11; 2 Thess 2:8 [lawless one]; 2 Cor. 6:15 [Belial]). Initially the activities of this beast are limited to uttering blasphemies against God and taking control over all nations and people on the earth (13:5-10). But now the woman rides on its back thus using it as a means to exerting her corrupting influence upon the people of the earth.



In the angel's description of the beast, he first brings into the picture a mocking of the supernatural nature of this critter (v. 8), before he then gives an allegorical interpretation of just its heads and horns (vv. 9-14). The other characteristics of its appearance are not treated since they evidently is not central to the spiritual point being made in this depiction.

1) The phony supernatural nature of the beast, v. 8. τὸ θηρίον ὃ εἶδες ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν

Several implications of this ‘epitaph’ for the beast are present here. The longer expression v. 8 has strong affinities with a common Roman tomb epitaph, *non fui, fui, non sum, non desidero, I was not, I was, I am not, I do not care*. A relatively common Greek version was οὐκ ἦμην, ἐγενόμην, ἦμην, οὐκ εἰμί· τοσαῦτα, *I was not, I was born, I was, I am not, so much for that*. The epitaph for the beast then becomes ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, *He was and is not and is going to come up out of the abyss and depart into destruction*. From the two earlier specifications of origin, τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, *the beast coming up out of the abyss* (11:7), and ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον, *out of the sea a beast coming up* (13:1),¹⁵ the ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν specifies previous existence on earth followed by suspended activity in the pattern subsequently as signaled for the dragon in 20:2, καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὅς ἐστιν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη 3 καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἀβυσσον καὶ ἐκλείσεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη, *and He seized the dragon, the old serpent who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years and threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it over him lest he deceive the nations until the thousand years was completed*. But at the end of time the beast -- and the dragon (20:3) -- will rise up out of the abyss but only to be forever banished into destruction: μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει.¹⁶ His ultimate

force, it must refer to a person who both died and returned from the dead (or was expected to do so), and it is therefore probably a reference to the *Nero redivivus* myth (Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 174).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 939–940.]

¹⁵Remember that the bottomless pit τῆς ἀβύσσου and the sea

τῆς θαλάσσης both went down to the underworld below the earth’s surface where the beast was first located. Thus which route taken out of this underworld to the surface of the earth is not important. This is why the second beast exits the underworld through an opening in the earth,

most likely a cave: ἄλλο θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς (13:11).

¹⁶“The threefold formula corresponds to the career of Satan in 20:1–10. Both refer to the same events but respectively from the vantage point of the beast and then of Satan. In ch. 20 Satan is said to have existed in the past (20:1 = ‘he was’), he is locked up in an

destiny is labeled here and in v. 11 as ἀπώλεια, *destruction*. In 19:20 this destiny is depicted as εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης, *into the lake of sulfur burning fire*. The use of ἀπώλεια here reflects an ironical play on words with both the Greek and the underlying Hebrew terms.¹⁷ The *destroyer*, Ἀπολλύων (cf. 9:11), is himself *destroyed* ἀπώλειαν.

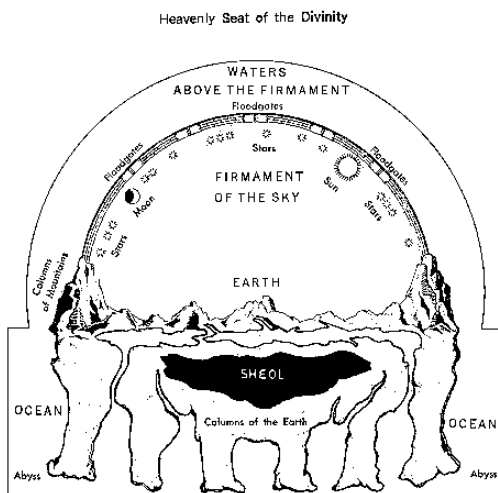
The second part of the angel’s initial depiction centers on the reaction of the word to this beast: καὶ θαυμασθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, *and those dwelling upon the earth were continually astounded*. The point of their amazement focused upon the beast ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, *was and is not and is going to arise out of the abyss*. That is, the beast appears to have come back to life from death. This echoes the similar scenario described about this beast in 13:3, καὶ μίαν ἐκ τῶν κεφαλῶν αὐτοῦ ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον, καὶ ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἔθεραπεύθη. Καὶ ἐθαυμάσθη ὅλη ἡ γῆ ὀπίσω τοῦ θηρίου, *and one of his heads was as though it had received a death blow. And the entire earth was astounded before the beast*. This sounds a lot like the *Nero redivivus* myth that was widely circulated in the eastern empire from Asia to the middle east at the end of the first century.

The worshipful astonishment of the people at this beast come back to life is not shared by everyone alive on earth. Even though John’s use of the phrase οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, *those dwelling upon the earth*, uniformly signals the evil people in the world throughout Revelation,¹⁸ he explicitly excludes from this group God’s people alive on earth with the relative clause ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, *regarding whom is not written their name in the book of life from the foundation of the world*. The designation of the people of God in this manner of having their name recorded in the book of life is also found in 13:8; 20:15; 21:27. It stands as an affirming label underscoring that God will not lose track of His people.

‘abyss’ (20:1–3 = “was not”), ‘it is necessary’ that he ascend from the abyss in the future ‘for a little time’ (20:3, 7–9 = ‘he will be’; cf. 17:10), and he will go to destruction (20:9–10).⁵³ [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 865.]

¹⁷“The term ἀπώλειαν, ‘destruction,’ appears to be a play on words, since in 9:11 the angel of the abyss (τῆς ἀβύσσου) is called Ἀπολλύων, ‘Destroyer’ (a formation from the Greek verb ἀπολλύναι, ‘to destroy’), a Greek translation of the Hebrew name אַבְדֹן *’ābaddōn* (also mentioned in 9:11), which is translated ἀπώλεια in the LXX (Job 26:6; 28:22; Ps 88:11; Prov 15:11); cf. BAGD, 1. This reflects the principle of *lex talionis*, i.e., the ‘law of retributive justice,’ in that the Destroyer is himself destroyed.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 940.]

¹⁸Cf. 3:10; 6:10, 13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8.



The τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς, *book of life*, plays off the background image of a registry of citizens of each of the towns and cities of John's world. One's name as a Roman citizen, in the days of the empire, was permanently entered into the town registry where he was born or where he became a Roman citizen. Also formal citizenship of the town of one's birth was issued at the same time to those who qualified. See Acts 21:39 where Paul claims both Roman citizenship and Tarsus citizenship. Should the individual lose his copy of his citizenship papers, he could always return to that original city and secure a new copy of the citizenship papers (upon paying a fee). This practice began with the Greeks and a town registry of citizens was created at the founding of the city. One had to have proof of citizenship in order to participate in the town hall meetings where voting on issues took place in a direct democracy process.¹⁹

Interestingly, God's people have a citizenship in God's eternal city, and He established that citizenship before the world was created: ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, *from the foundation of the world*. The concept here reflects that of Paul in Eph. 1:4, καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, *just as He chose us in love in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world to be holy ones and blameless one in His presence*. In God's complete knowledge of everything, He knew well in advance who would make a genuine faith commitment to Christ. These He enrolled in the citizenship registry of Heaven before the world was even created. Especially for John's initial readers in Asia these were fantastic words of encouragement and assurance.

The final participle phrase βλέπόντων τὸ θηρίον ὅτι ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται, *seeing the beast because he was and is not and is coming*, is grammatically awkward even though framed as a Genitive Absolute participle phrase. Who does the seeing embedded in the participle are οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, *those dwelling on the earth*. As an adverbial causal participle phrase it is attached to the main clause verb θαυμασθήσονται, *they*

¹⁹Lest one see this too simplistically, there should be the reminder that 'citizenship' in these cities was extremely limited to a small portion of the landed elite of the city.

It was awareness of this ancient Greek pattern that prompted some of the US founding fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson, to insist upon limiting voting rights severely in the writing of the US constitution. Also these writers of the US constitution opted as well for a representative democracy rather than a direct democracy in order to further limit the influence of ordinary citizens on the decisions of government. They departed from the Greek tradition at this point. Their huge mistake, however, was in writing the US Constitution in highly idealistic language rather than in the raw elitism that governed their thinking in the late 1700s. This idealistic language later on opened the door for inclusiveness of all who were born in the US to qualify as citizens with the right to vote.

will be astounded. The conceptualization then moves along the lines of 'they will be astounded because of seeing the beast because he was and is not and is coming.' The placing of this phrase at the end of the sentence ties together everything in verse eight as a single unitary idea.

2) *The allegorical interpretation of its heads and horns, vv. 9-14.*

9 ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν. Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν. καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσὶν· 10 οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν, καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μένειν. 11 καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει. 12 Καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσὶν, οἵτινες βασιλείαν οὐπω ἔλαβον, ἀλλ' ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεῖς μίαν ὥραν λαμβάνουσιν μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου. 13 οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσίαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ διδόασιν. 14 οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί. 9 "This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, 10 of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; 14 they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

Two separate interpretive issues emerge here: 1) the role of ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν in 9a, and 2) the allegorical attribution of meaning to the heads and horns of the beast, vv. 9b-14. Numerous other qualities of appearance surface elsewhere, but here the only important qualities needing interpretation are the heads and horns.²⁰

ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν. The heart of the issue is where the adverb of place ὧδε, *here*, refers to what has just been presented or anticipates what is about to be presented. In four of the six instances

²⁰"The figure of the beast is mentioned in four narrative passages in Revelation (longest to shortest: 13:1-18; 17:3-17; 20:7-10; 19:17-21; 11:7), elsewhere in discrete sayings on the brand of the beast and the worship of his image (14:9; 15:2; 16:2), and two more times in a variety of brief miscellaneous notices (16:10, 13). A synoptic comparison of the main narratives about the beast indicate that the author had experimented with a basic 'biographical' conception." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 941.]

where ὡδε is used as a part of a formulaic statement as here -- 13:10; 14:12; 13:18; 17:9 -- the reference point can go either direction:

13:10, Ωδε ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων. **Here is a call for patience and faith by the saints.** The thrust of ὡδε is backward to what was just said about coming persecution.

14:12, ὡδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ. **Here is a call for endurance by the saints who keep God's commandments and faith in Jesus.** This reaches backwards also in regard to the people on the earth worshiping the beast and what God's people can expect as a consequence.

13:18, ὡδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν. **Here is a call for wisdom.** This reaches forward to the need for wisdom in calculating the spiritual meaning of the beast's number of 666, but the material leading up to this calculation plays a significant role as well.

17:9, ὡδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν. **Here is a call for the mind that possesses wisdom.** Does this ὡδε reach backward to understanding not to worship the beast along with the rest of the world? Or, does it reach forward to the required wisdom for understanding the meaning of the seven heads and ten horns of the beast?

The pattern found in both the Nestle-Aland and UBS printed Greek texts for the past several editions is to understand it reaching back in harmony with the three preceding instances. But the Westcott-Hort 1881 Greek text understands it going with what follows. Numerous English translations understand it reaching forward to what follows: RSV; NRSV, NLT; ESV; NKJV; HCSB; LEB; GNB; Message; NCV. So also the Spanish DHH and the French BFC97; LSG. But the German ZB translates as reaching backward, along with the LB1984. Numerous others take a neutral stance with the use of a period after σοφίαν, and with no paragraph divisions. These follow the lead of the Vulgate, then the KJV in English, the early translations of the LB (1545; 1912) in German, Segound in French; and the LBLA in Spanish. In conclusion to this survey the recent Greek texts understand it to reach back along with the most recent German translations. But most of the English, French, and Spanish translations understand it to refer to what follows. Then the third neutral category which follows the Vulgate and do not signal what the translators thought it referred to.

Examination of the evidence, especially contextually, favors taking ὡδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν with what preceded it.²¹ This unusual combination of ὁ νοῦς and ὁ

²¹“This statement does not introduce what follows (as in the NRSV where it introduces a new paragraph) but refers to the narrative riddle of the beast proposed in v 8. That it refers to what has already been said is confirmed by literary parallels. One such parallel expression is found in 13:18, ὡδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν, ‘Here is wisdom.’ The parallel sayings in both 13:18 and 17:9 conclude a riddle and

νοῦς has some apocalyptic Jewish tones to it. In 13:18 John's use of this formula called for wisdom, and such is the case here. Here the νοῦς of the read is to be utilized for understanding what John has brought up with the formula ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται concerning the beast. But not just a mind alone is necessary. Instead a mind that can think like God thinks is required.

The angelic interpretation of heads and horns. What follows in vv. 9b-14 is the angel's interpretation of the seven heads and the ten horns of the beast. This is all that he interprets.

The seven heads, Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαί, have a double meaning:

a) ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν, **they are seven hills where the woman sits upon them.**

b) καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν, **and they are seven kings.** Nothing more is said about the seven hills, ἑπτὰ ὄρη, since this is an obvious reference to the seven hills upon which the city of Rome is located.²² The location of the beast is Rome and sitting on his back is Roma.

function to emphasize that a mysterious set of apocalyptic symbols requires interpretation. An important parallel outside Revelation is found in the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13:14, where the author breaks in and directly addresses the reader with a parenthetical comment, ‘Let the reader understand,’ a saying that follows the apocalyptic symbol of the ‘desolating sacrilege.’ With this editorial statement the author calls attention to the immediately preceding prophecy of Jesus and implicitly underlines the difficulty of the saying. Similarly, in Barn. 4:6a, the author concludes a section in which he cites Dan 7:24 and 7:7–8 as prophecies referring to the present time with the saying συνιέναι οὖν ὀφείλετε, ‘you ought to understand,’ again emphasizing the difficulty of interpreting the apocalyptic symbols in Daniel. Beale (TynBul 31 [1980] 163–70) argues that the Hebrew counterparts of νοῦς, ‘mind, understanding,’ and σοφία, ‘wisdom,’ שֵׁכֶל *śēkel* and בִּין *bīn*, occur together five times in Daniel (1:4, 17; 9:22; 11:33; 12:10) and that since this combination is rare in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish apocalyptic literature, the idea of eschatological insight in Daniel is the background against which v 9 must be understood. Yet these Hebrew terms do not have any consistent translation in the LXX or Theod, and it is simply not true that terms meaning ‘wisdom’ and ‘understanding’ are absent from early Jewish apocalyptic literature. The phrase ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ διάνοια, ‘mind and understanding,’ occurs in T. Reub. 46, and the phrase νοῦς σοφός, ‘wise mind,’ occurs in an oracular context in Sib. Or 5.286. The combined qualities of σύνεσις καὶ σοφία, ‘understanding and wisdom,’ are prayed for in T. Zeb. 6:1 (cf. 1 Clem. 32:4). In the Pistis Sophia 1.40 (ed. Schmidt-Till, p. 41, lines 3f. = ed. Schmidt-MacDermot, p. 65), the mystery of the fourth repentance of Sophia is emphasized by this statement attributed to Jesus, ‘now at this time let him who understands [νοεῖν] understand [νοεῖν],’ and is followed by an interpretation of the mystery.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 941.]

²²“The phrase ‘seven hills’ or ‘seven mountains’ was widely used during the late first century B.C. (after Varro) and the first century A.D. and would be instantly recognizable as a metaphor for Rome.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 944.]

the goddess representing the city itself. That would have been abundantly clear to John's initial readers.²³

²³“The phrase ‘seven hills’ as a symbol for Rome occurs frequently in writers following the mid-first century B.C. (Juvenal Satires 9.130; Propertius 3.11.57; Horace Carmen saeculare 5; Ovid Tristia 1.5.69; Pliny Hist. nat. 3.66–67; Claudian Bell. Gild. 104; VI cons. Hon. 617). The location of Rome, according to Varro, was called the Septimontium; his list of the Seven Hills includes (De lingua Latina 5.41–54): (1) Capitol (previously called Tarpeian and earlier Saturnian), (2) Aventine, (3) Caelian, (4) Esquiline, (5) Quirinal, (6) Viminal, and (7) Palatine. In the seventh century B.C., settlers on seven hills near the Tiber in central Italy united (Palatium, Velia, Fagatal, Germalus, Caelius, Oppius, and Cispius); the Germalus and the Palatium were sections of the Palatine, and the Oppius, Cispius, and Fagatal were sections of the Esquiline (CAH 7/2:83; the list is preserved by Paulus Fest. 341M). These seven areas were therefore not the same as the canon of the traditional Seven Hills later identified by M. Terentius Varro (CAH 7/2:84).

“There is evidence to suggest that the canon of the Seven Hills of Rome was in fact invented by Varro, 116–27 B.C. (Gelsomino, Varrone, 37–54, 81–83). Varro wrote a book, now lost, entitled *Hebdomades*, in which he indulged in elaborate speculations on the significance of the number seven (Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 3.10). Varro also refers to the *dies Septimontium*, ‘Septimontium day,’ a festival only for people who live on the *septem montes* (De lingua Latina 6.24). However, these are not identical with the traditional Seven Hills (Servius Comm. in Verg. Aen. 6.783; Scullard, *Festivals*, 203–4; CAH 7/2:83–84; Gelsomino, Varrone, 27–31). Domitian was responsible for reviving the Septimontia (Suetonius Dom. 4.5). According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Seven Hills of Rome were included within the pomerium, ‘boundaries,’ of Rome by stages during the monarchy (1.31.3–4: Palatine; 1.34.1: Capitoline [earlier called Saturnian]; 2.62.5: Quirinal; 3.1.5: Caelian; 3.43.1: Aventine; 3.69.4: Capitoline [formerly called Tarpeian]; 4.13.2: Viminal and Esquiline). The traditional list of Seven Hills is also found in Strabo (63–21 B.C.): Capitoline, Palatine, Quirinal, Caelian, Aventine, Esquiline, and Viminal (5.3.7). Cicero, writing ca. 52–51 B.C., refers simply to the Esquiline and Quirinal hills among others, but does not mention seven hills or use the term Septimontium (Gelsomino, Varrone, 31–35). After Varro, however, the tradition of the Seven Hills became an enormously popular image for Rome (Gelsomino, Varrone, 55–66). Vergil (70–19 B.C.) twice refers to the Seven Hills enclosed by a single wall (Aeneid 6.783; Georgics 2.535). The traditional Seven Hills are listed on an inscription from Corinth on the base of a statue erected during the first half of the second century A.D., probably depicting Dea Roma seated or standing on the Seven Hills of Rome (H. S. Robinson, “A Monument of Roma at Corinth,” *Hesperia* 43 [1974] 470–84, plates 101–6): “PALATINUS / MONS, ESQUILINUS / MONS, AVENTINUS / MONS, CAELIUS / MONS, COLLIS VIMINALIS, [COLLIS / QUIRINALIS], CAPITOLINUS / MONS.”

“Roman writers often used the terms *mons*, ‘mountain,’ and *collis*, ‘hill,’ interchangeably when referring to the Seven Hills of Rome (cf. Horace Carm. saec. 7, who refers to the seven *colles*; Tibullus 2.5.55–56 refers to the seven *montes*; Livy 1.44.3; see Platner, CP 2 [1907] 433–34, and Fridh, *Eranos* 91 [1993] 1–12), while the canonical nomenclature used the term *collis* of the Quirinal and the Viminal and *mons* of each of the other hills.

“The depiction of the woman seated on seven mountains has an antithetical parallel in the two versions of Enoch’s vision of the seven mountains in 1 Enoch 18:6–8 and 24:1–25:3 (Black, 1

What would not have so clear is the further symbolical meaning of the heads and horns. So this is what the angel explains to John.

- 1) **Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαί, seven heads** (vv. 9b-11)
 - a) = ἑπτὰ ὄρη, **seven hills**.
 - i) ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ’ αὐτῶν, **where the woman sits upon them**
 - b) = βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ, **seven kings**
 - i) οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν, **five are fallen, one is; the other has yet to come**
 - ii) καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μείναι, **and whenever it may come it can remain only a short time.**
 - c) καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, **and the beast which was and is not and itself is an eighth and out of the seven it is, and into destruction it departs.**

This somewhat complex interpretation uncovers the meaning of these seven heads. In contrast to the ten horns which specify rulers loyal to Rome and the beast, the seven heads specify emperors of the empire of Rome. Each one signifies one phase of the existence of the beast. This is in addition to the seven heads specifying the seven hills of Rome.²⁴

Elsewhere the dragon possessed seven heads and ten horns (12:3). One must not forget the very close relationship between the dragon and the first beast from chapter twelve onward. John repeatedly sees the empowerment of the Roman empire for evil as coming from Satan himself. Although this evil power is perceived in the late first century as embedded in the Roman empire and its rulers, this same empowerment for evil will surface in subsequent evil empires and rulers down to the end of time. In the initial depiction of this beast the seven heads and ten horns are mentioned (13:1). In chapter 17 special attention is focused on the seven heads and ten horns (17:3, 7, 9).

Enoch, 158, 169). In 1 Enoch 18:8, the middle mountain is said to reach to heaven, like the throne of the Lord. In 1 Enoch 24:3, the seven mountains appear to form a throne where the Lord of Glory will sit when he comes to visit the earth (25:3).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 944–945.]

²⁴This double application of the seven heads is a part of the rather arbitrary signification of meaning from the allegorical approach of the angel in his interpretation. Somewhat typical of this method in the context of apocalyptic visionary interpretation is the interpretation coming in the form of a riddle which must still be interpreted by the reader in a further step before clear understanding is achieved. The angel doesn’t provide interpreting down to this level. This is where the σοφία, *wisdom* (v. 9a), of the reader comes into the process. Without it, the image remains a mystery to the uninformed reader, i.e., a Roman censor.

The giving of a second meaning to the symbol of the seven heads is unique to this passage in Revelation. Apocalyptic tradition among the Jews tended consistently to associate heads of many headed creatures with evil rulers.²⁵ The translation of βασιλεῖς as king should be understood from the standpoint of βασιλεῖς as designating the highest level of power in a monarch. Even after the first century AD, βασιλεῖς came to be the translation into Greek for the Latin *imperator* (emperor).²⁶ Thus βασιλεῖς can easily specify the Roman emperor in a text such as this.

The challenge with the seven kings meaning attributed to the seven heads is solving the riddle that the angel's interpretation presents: five of them have passed (οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν); one is now reigning (ὁ εἷς ἔστιν); the seventh is not yet reigning (ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν); and when he comes he will only reign a short time (καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μεῖναι). As one might expect, interpreters

²⁵“**9c** καὶ βασιλεῖς ἐπτά εἰσιν, ‘They are also seven kings.’ Though the seven horns have already been interpreted as seven hills (i.e., the city of Rome), an unprecedented second interpretation explains the seven horns as seven kings (i.e., emperors of Rome); this suggests that the author has revised an earlier source, whether by himself or another. In apocalyptic tradition there is a tendency to associate the heads of many-headed creatures seen in dreams or visions with rulers. In Dan 7:6, the four-headed leopard represents Persia, while the four heads apparently represent four kings (Dan 11:2), though it is not clear precisely which four kings are in view. In CDa 8:11 and CDb 19:23–24, the ‘head of the cruel, harsh asps’ in Deut 32:33 (note the differences with the MT) is interpreted as follows: ‘the asps’ head is the head of the kings of Greece’ (tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 38). In 4 Ezra 12:22–26, the three heads of the eagle are said to represent three kings. Similarly, when the existence of a three-headed male creature was reported to Apollonius of Tyana, he reportedly interpreted this phenomenon to represent three emperors, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius (Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 5.13). Some of the golden crowns worn by priests of the imperial cult (see Comment on 4:4) are depicted with the busts of seven figures (see J. Inan and E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum, *Römische und frühbyzantinische Porträtplastik aus der Türkei: Neue Funde* ([Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1979] vol. 1, no. 230 [pp. 252–53], plate in vol. 2, no. 164).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 945.]

²⁶ “The term βασιλεῖς, usually translated “kings,” and the most elevated title of Hellenistic monarchs, can equally well be translated “emperors.” However, βασιλεύς is not widely used as a Greek translation of the Latin term *imperator*, “emperor,” until the second century A.D. (Mason, *Greek Terms*, 120–21). For references, see 1 Pet 2:13; 1 Tim 2:2; Acta Alex. IV.iii.5, 15; XI.ii.6; XII.10 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 19, 66, 71); BAGD, 136; Bauer-Aland, 272. The term αὐτοκράτωρ was normally used as an exact translation equivalent of *imperator*. Antipater of Thessaly used βασιλεύς to refer to Augustus in an epigram (Anth. Pal. 10.26). When Plutarch refers to the @Ρωμαίων βασιλεῖς, he probably means “kings of Rome” (i.e., the seven kings before the beginning of the Republic in 586 B.C.) rather than “emperors of Rome” (De tranquillitate 6.467E).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 946.]

barge in with speculative explanations whether or not they possess the mandated σοφίαν (v. 9a).²⁷ Enormous problems exist with any attempt to identify these seven with specific Roman emperors, not the least of which is who to consider as the first emperor -- something of considerable debate in John's day among the Greek and Roman historians.²⁸ None of the schemes makes

²⁷“The identity of these seven kings has been the subject of speculation, though no single solution has found wide support among scholars (see Excursus 17B: Alternate Ways of Counting the Roman Emperors). There are at least three approaches to interpreting vv 9c–11: (1) the historical approach, (2) the symbolic approach, and (3) a combination of the historical and symbolic approaches.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 946.]

²⁸“Many commentators have attempted to identify the kings mentioned in Rev 17:9–11 with specific Roman emperors and on that basis to suggest a specific date for the composition of Revelation (see Excursus 17B below, where the main options are summarized).

“One matter of importance is the way in which the ancient Greeks and Romans themselves enumerated the Roman emperors. Some considered Julius Caesar the first of the Roman emperors, while others regarded Augustus as the first. In the enumeration of nineteen emperors through the numerical value of their names in Sib. Or 5.12–51, the list begins with Julius Caesar and concludes with Marcus Aurelius. Since the generic term Caesar was derived from the name of Julius Caesar, it was natural for ancients to consider him the first Roman emperor. Suetonius (born ca. A.D. 70; died after 122) began his *Lives of the Caesars* with the biography of Julius Caesar. Dio Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 40–after 112) refers in Or. 34.7 to Augustus as ὁ δεῦτερος Καῖσαρ, ‘the second Caesar’ (Mussies, Dio, 253), just as Josephus referred to Augustus as the δεῦτερος @Ρωμαίων αὐτοκράτωρ, ‘the second emperor of the Romans’ (Ant. 18.32), both clearly implying that Julius Caesar was the first emperor. On the other hand, Suetonius reports that Claudius wrote a history of Rome that began with the death of Julius Caesar (Claud. 41; see Momigliano, *Claudius*, 6–7), suggesting that he regarded Augustus as the first emperor. Similarly, Tacitus began his *Annals* with Augustus, whom he considered the first emperor.

“While Rev 17:9c seems relatively clear, scholars have interpreted this text in a bewildering number of ways (for surveys, see Beckwith, 704–8; Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 58–64). Following the assumption that Rev 17:9b–11 refers to Roman history, it is logical to assume that if one begins to calculate the seven kings or emperors beginning with Julius Caesar (see Excursus 17B: Alternate Ways of Counting the Roman Emperors), and includes the three short-term emperors who reigned briefly in A.D. 68–69, then Galba (October 68 to 15 January 69) would be the ‘other,’ i.e., the seventh emperor who would appropriately be said to reign ‘for only a short time.’ However, if one begins counting with Julius Caesar but excludes the three emperors who reigned briefly in A.D. 68–69 (as many scholars do), then Claudius would be the fifth emperor, and Nero (13 October 54 to 9 June 68) the sixth emperor, the ‘one [who] is living’ (Wilson, NTS 39 [1993] 599), and Vespasian (1 July 69 to 23 June 79) would be the ‘other,’ the seventh emperor who will reign ‘for only a short while’ (though in fact Vespasian ruled for eleven years). On the other hand, if one begins with Augustus as the first of the kings who have fallen, and if one includes the three emperors who reigned briefly during the

much sense, and unquestionably provides no legitimate foundation for dating the composition of Revelation. This in turn points toward a symbolic interpretation of the seven kings with little or no connection to the Roman empire.²⁹ In the background stands the widely tumultuous years A.D. 68–69, then the fifth emperor would be Nero, the ‘one [who] is living’ would be Galba, and the ‘other’ who will reign ‘for only a short while’ would be Otho (5 January 69 to 16 April 69). However, if the three emperors of A.D. 68–69 are excluded, Nero would be the fifth emperor, the ‘one [who] is living’ would be Vespasian, and the ‘other’ who will reign ‘for only a short while’ would be Titus (23 June 79 to 13 September 81), who was apparently known to be in ill health (Plutarch *De tuenda san. praec.* 123d). Since the phrase ‘one is living’ seems to refer to the emperor whose reign was contemporaneous with the composition of Rev 17:9–11, the main options are Nero or Galba (Weiss-Heitmüller, 302; Beckwith, 704; Bishop, Nero, 173; Wilson, NTS 39 [1993] 605), while the questionable procedure of omitting the three so-called interregum emperors would point to either Vespasian (A.D. 69–79) or Titus (A.D. 79–81).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 946–947.]

²⁹“2. *The symbolic approach.* Some have maintained, I think correctly, that John is not referring to seven specific kings; rather he is using the number seven as an apocalyptic symbol, a view that has become increasingly popular among scholars (Beckwith, 704–8; Kiddle-Ross, 350–51; Lohmeyer, 143; Beasley-Murray, 256–57; Caird, 218–19; Lohse, 95; Guthrie, Introduction, 959; Mounce, 315; Sweet, 257; Harrington, 172; Giblin, 164–65; Talbert, 81).

“For several reasons, the symbolic rather than the historical approach to interpreting the seven kings is convincing. (a) Seven, a symbolic number widely used in the ancient world, occurs fifty-three times in Revelation to reflect the divine arrangement and design of history and the cosmos. The enumeration of just seven kings, therefore, suggests the propriety of a symbolic rather than a historical interpretation. (b) The seven heads of the beast, first interpreted as seven hills and then as seven kings, is based on the archaic mythic tradition of the seven-headed dragon widely known in the ancient world (see Comment on 12:3). Since the author is working with traditional material, this again suggests that precisely seven kings should be interpreted symbolically. (c) Rome, founded in 753 B.C. according to Varro (several alternate dates are suggested by other ancient authors), was an Etruscan monarchy until the expulsion of the last Etruscan king, Tarquinius Superbus, in 508 B.C. From the perspective of canonical Roman tradition, there were exactly seven kings in all: Romulus, Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, Ancus Marcus, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius (the only king of Latin origin), and Tarquinius Superbus (though it is true that Lars Porsenna, the Etruscan king of Clusium, controlled Rome briefly after the expulsion of Tarquinius Superbus [Tacitus *Hist.* 3.72; Pliny *Hist. nat.* 34.139]). While there were probably more than seven historical kings (Momigliano, CAH 7/2:96), Roman and Etruscan historians identified minor figures with major ones to maintain the canonical number. The number seven was referred to frequently in that connection (Appian *Bell. civ. praef.* 14; bk. 1, frag. 2; a magical prayer in Demotic found in PDM XIV.299 is addressed to the seven kings, though what this means is impossible to say). There is also occasional reference to the seven archons who rule the seven planetary spheres (the sun, the moon, and five planets) as kings (Ap. John II/1 11.4–6).

adopted Roman view of seven kings completing the Etruscan control of Rome from its perceived founding in 753 BCE. Even though historically there were many more than seven Etruscan rulers over Rome, only seven were counted in order to keep the symbolically perfect number of seven. Corresponding to this is the 53 instances of the number seven asserting symbolic completion for the divine arrangement and plan regarding the universe and human history.

In John’s 5 + 1 + 1 formula for the seven kings, he signals to his readers the approaching end of human history and the ushering in of the eternal order of things. He doesn’t predict the downfall of Domitian (81–96 AD) and the short reign of Nerva (96–98 AD). The sixth king, ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, one who is, probably alludes to the current emperor at the time of the writing, but one should be very cautious about linking this to Vespasian.³⁰ Clearly the seventh king, ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν, καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μεῖναι, **the other has not yet come, and whenever he comes he will only reign for a short time**, is linked to the end time with his short reign matching the other references to a short burst of evil right at the very end:

“3. *The combined symbolic and historical approach.* Some combine the two ways of construing vv 9c–11 because, although the enumeration of seven kings has a good claim to be understood symbolically, the reference in v 10a to the sixth emperor who is now living would be readily identifiable by the audience to whom John addressed his apocalypse. Since the focus of vv 9c–10 is on the king who is now living and on the one who will come shortly but remain for only a little while, the identity of the first five kings is irrelevant and probably does not refer to five specific kings (Bauckham, *Climax*, 406–7). Further, the statement that the king who will come shortly will reign for only a short time is a stereotypical apocalyptic motif that emphasizes the nearness of the end.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 948–949.]

³⁰“The phrase ‘one is living’ appears to suggest that the person who formulated this statement was contemporaneous with the sixth king and wrote during his reign; the statement that the seventh king ‘has not yet come’ constitutes a prophecy. Weiss-Heitmüller (302) thought that 17:10 meant that Revelation was written during the reign of the sixth emperor, whom they believed to be Galba. Unfortunately, ‘the one who is living’ is ultimately ambiguous since he can variously be identified as Nero, Galba, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, or Domitian (see Excursus 17B and Comment on v 9c). A further complication is the possibility that the final author of Rev 17 did not write during the reign of the sixth emperor, ‘who is living,’ but revised and updated a document that was written at an earlier time (see Introduction, Section 2: Date, pp. lxi–lxii). It has also been proposed that the seven ‘kings’ are the seven commanders of seven cities in northern Palestine during the beginning of the first Jewish revolt (A.D. 66–73), and the ‘eighth’ is John of Gischala (Holwerda, EB 53 [1995] 394–95). The ‘five who have fallen’ are the five fortresses in northern Palestine with their commanders: Sepphoris, Jotapata, Tiberias, Tarichea, and Mount Tabor.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 949.]

Rev. 12:12, οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν, εἰδὼς ὅτι **ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει**, But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that **his time is short!**

Rev. 9:5. καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτούς, ἀλλ' ἵνα βασανισθῆσονται **μῆνας πέντε**, καὶ ὁ βασανισμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς βασανισμὸς σκορπίου ὅταν παίσῃ ἄνθρωπον. **They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone.**

Rev. 9:10. καὶ ἔχουσιν οὐράς ὁμοίας σκορπίοις καὶ κέντρα, καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἀδικῆσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους **μῆνας πέντε**, **They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months.**

Rev. 11:2. καὶ τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ναοῦ ἔκβαλε ἔξωθεν καὶ μὴ αὐτὴν μετρήσῃς, ὅτι ἐδόθη τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν πατήσουσιν **μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα [καὶ] δύο**. **but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.**

Rev. 13:5. Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μεγάλα καὶ βλασφημίας καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία ποιῆσαι **μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα [καὶ] δύο**. **The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.**

Rev. 20:3b. μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν **μικρὸν χρόνον**. **After that he must be let out for a little while.**

Clearly from this listing of texts a picture of a short burst of evil with both the dragon and the beast heading it up is projected at the very end of time before Christ destroys both of them and the evil people of the world with one word coming from His mouth (cf. 19:11-21; 20:7-15). All are summarily cast into the lake of fire for eternal torments.

This seventh king represents the world ruler, i.e., the beast with his last head still functioning, to emerge during this short period at the end who will work in tandem with Satan but both will be utterly defeated by Christ. How long this final period will last is only defined variously by John a month, five months, forty-two months, and a short time. That is, this period won't extend for a long period of time.³¹

Part 1.c. in the above outline based on verse eleven contributes to this picture with a graphic assertion of the continued influence of the beast through these seven heads. John doesn't want his readers to lose sight of the beast in this explanation (καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν,

³¹Very likely it is to this period that the so-called "signs of the end" in the three Little Apocalypses in the synoptic gospels are pointing toward. Additionally, Paul's period of lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2 points this direction as well most likely. But one should be extremely cautious in linking all of these up with one another since they stand as distinct and different perspectives on end times.

and himself is the eighth). The beast is an extension of the seven heads, i.e., kings (καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐπτὰ ἐστίν, and he is one of the seven). Yet he has a continuing identity through the rise and fall of each of the seven heads. And it is the beast that is bound from destruction at the end: καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει. That is, no more evil rulers will emerge working in tandem with the dragon, Satan, in opposing God and His people.

In conclusion, the allegorical explanation of the angel leads the reader to a riddle which he then must solve with the help of the divine wisdom available to the people of God. But the solution cannot be found in linking up the five heads of the beast to Roman emperors. Rather these heads reflect evil powers like the Roman emperors who oppose God and His people. The last one to surface will come at the very end of time only to be quickly destroyed by Christ Himself. God's people will suffer persecution under these evil heads but martyrdom as a believer immediately transfers one into the full presence of God in eternity, rather than spelling the end. God controls that totally!

2) Καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες, and the ten horns which you saw (vv. 12-14)

- a) δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσιν, they are ten kings
 - i) οἵτινες βασιλείαν οὐπω ἔλαβον, who have not yet received a kingdom
 - ii) ἀλλ' ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεῖς μίαν ὥραν λαμβάνουσιν μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου. but who receive authority as a king for one hour with the beast
 - iii) οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσίαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ διδόασιν. these have one purpose and their power and authority to the beast they give
 - iv) οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστίν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί. These with make war against the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings and with Him are the called and the elect and the faithful.

The second part of the angel's allegorical explanation to John focuses on the meaning of the ten horns. Here the ten horns is the exclusive explanation.

The core explanation that is foundational to the rest of the interpretation comes in v. 12a: Καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσιν, **And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings**. Just how ten horns are affixed to the seven heads of the beast is never explained. In the initial depiction of the beast in 13:1-3, δέκα διαδήματα,

ten diadem crowns, were attached to the ten horns (13:1b), along with a long list of ὀνόμα[τα] βλασφημίας, **blasphemous names**, on the seven heads. Here in 17:12 only the horns are important enough to require explanation. They are mentioned in this chapter at vv. 3, 7, 12, and 16, thus they receive considerable attention.

In the angel's interpretation these ten horns also represent δέκα βασιλεῖς, **ten kings**. In the background here is Dan. 7:7-8, 20, 24 with similar images but utilized by John in different ways from in Daniel.³² Also this image is found somewhat similarly in the *Sibylline Oracles* 3:387-400.³³ In Daniel and the Sibylline Ora-

³²**Dan. 7:7-8.** 7 μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐθεώρουν ἐν ὄραματι τῆς νυκτὸς θηρίον τέταρτον φοβερόν, καὶ ὁ φόβος αὐτοῦ ὑπερφέρων ἰσχύι, ἔχον ὀδόντας σιδηροῦς μεγάλους, ἐσθίον καὶ κοπανίζον, κύκλω τοῖς ποσὶ καταπατοῦν, διαφόρως χρώμενον παρὰ πάντα τὰ πρὸ αὐτοῦ θηρία· εἶχε δὲ κέρατα δέκα,† 8 καὶ βουλαὶ πολλαὶ ἐν τοῖς κέρασιν αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄλλο ἐν κέρασιν ἀνεφύη ἀνὰ μέσον αὐτῶν μικρὸν ἐν τοῖς κέρασιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ τρία τῶν κεράτων τῶν πρώτων ἐξηράνθησαν δι' αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἰδοὺ ὀφθαλμοὶ ὡσπερ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἀνθρώπινον ἐν τῷ κέρατι τούτῳ καὶ στόμα λαλοῦν μέγαλα, καὶ ἐποίει πόλεμον πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους.†

7 After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns. 8 I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly.

Dan. 7:20. 20 καὶ περὶ τῶν δέκα κεράτων αὐτοῦ τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς τοῦ ἄλλου τοῦ προσφυνέντος, καὶ ἐξέπεσαν δι' αὐτοῦ τρία, καὶ τὸ κέρασιν ἐκεῖνο εἶχεν ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ στόμα λαλοῦν μέγαλα, καὶ ἡ πρόσοψις αὐτοῦ ὑπερέφερε τὰ ἄλλα.†

20 and concerning the ten horns that were on its head, and concerning the other horn, which came up and to make room for which three of them fell out—the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke arrogantly, and that seemed greater than the others.

Dan. 7:24. 24 καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα τῆς βασιλείας, δέκα βασιλεῖς στήσονται, καὶ ὁ ἄλλος βασιλεὺς μετὰ τούτους στήσεται, καὶ αὐτὸς διοίσει κακοῖς ὑπὲρ τοὺς πρώτους καὶ τρεῖς βασιλεῖς ταπεινώσει·†

24 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

33An oracle on Alexander and his descendants

* Also at a certain time there will come to the prosperous land of Asia a faithless man³² clad with a purple cloak on his shoulders, 390 savage, stranger to justice, fiery. For a thunderbolt beforehand raised him¹² up, a man. But all Asia will bear an evil yoke, and the earth, deluged, will imbibe much gore. But even so Hades will attend him in everything though he knows it not. Those whose race he wished to destroy, 395* by them will his own race be destroyed. Yet leaving one root, which the destroyer will also cut off from ten horns, he will sprout another shoot on the side.¹² He will smite a warrior and begetter of a royal race and he himself will perish at the hands of his descendants in a conspiracy of war,¹² 400* and then the horn growing on the side will reign.

[James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 1:370–

cles the ruling powers represented by horns follow one another in succession. But in Rev. 17:11-14 they rule contemporaneously during the 'short time' of the seventh head at the very end of time.

Here are the interpretive qualifications placed on the ten kings in the angel's interpretation. These are laid out in first a qualitative relative clause that is followed by two statements introduced by the same demonstrative pronoun οὗτοι. All three statements reach back to δέκα βασιλεῖς via a common antecedent for the three pronouns:

a) οἵτινες βασιλείαν οὐπω ἔλαβον, ἀλλ' ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεῖς μίαν ὥραν λαμβάνουσιν μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου. **who are such that they have not yet received a kingdom but are being given authority as kings for one hour with the beast** (v. 12b).

In the background here stands the Roman empire pattern of the client kings in the eastern empire granted authority to rule over territory by the emperor in Rome. Pompey and Antony early in the empire developed an elaborate system of client kingship as a more effective and efficient means of controlling the middle eastern territories which historically from the era of Alexandra the Great onward had proven hard to govern by outside forces.³⁴ This background understanding provided 371.]

³⁴Here the ten kings represent Roman client kings. Roman generals in the Greek east, particularly Pompey and Antony, developed an elaborate system of client kingship. Various kings and dynasts were sanctioned or elevated in order to serve as an inexpensive and effective means for controlling their regions, some of which were reorganized as provinces. Mark Antony appointed Herod and Phasael tetrarchs of Judea in 42 B.C. (Jos. J.W. 1.243–44), and upon his recommendation the senate was convened and passed a *senatus consultum* giving Herod the title "king" (Jos. J.W. 1.282–85). Herod's son Archelaus traveled to Rome to obtain the title of king as his father's successor (Jos. Ant. 17.208–22; J.W. 2.18), and Antipas, his rival for the throne, went to Rome for the same purpose (Jos. J.W. 2.20–22). Augustus, however, gave Archelaus only the title 'ethnarch' and gave Antipas and Philip (the other sons of Herod) the title of 'tetrarch' (Jos. J.W. 2.93–94). Augustus thus continued the institution of client kingship begun late in the republican period. Some of the major client kingdoms at various periods included Bosphorus, Pontus, Paphlagonia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Judea, Nabatea, Commagene, Emesa, Armenia, Osroene, Adiabene, Thrace, and Mauretania; see G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 42–61; Millar, *Near East*, index. There were also many client kingdoms subject to Parthia east of the Euphrates. While there were numerous dynastic kingdoms in the Near East during the reign of Augustus, by the early second century all those west of the Euphrates had disappeared. With the death of some of these client kings, or as a result of dynastic squabbling, their kingdoms were reorganized as Roman provinces (e.g., Galatia in 25 B.C., Paphlagonia in 6 B.C., Judea in A.D. 6; Emesa in the 70s A.D.; Commagene in A.D. 17 and again in A.D. 72 or 73 [i.e., it was made part of the province of Syria in A.D. 17; then king Antiochus IV was reinstated in A.D. 38, and Commagene was conquered in A.D. 72 or 73 and again

John with an image to project to this short reign³⁵ of the seventh head right at the end of time.³⁶ These who represent regional world wide rulers will come together with the beast who supplies them authorization to enforce their rule over the peoples of the world. Ultimately this authorization via John's language here comes from God as is made explicit in verse seventeen.

b) οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσίαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ διδῶσιν. **These have one mind and give their power and authority to the beast** (v. 13).

During this short reign at the end they will consolidate their power by yielding it to the beast in Rome who is running the show on earth.³⁷ Thus the entire world made part of the Roman province of Syria], Nabatea in A.D. 106 [Dio Cassius 68.14.5], Osrhoene with its capital in Edessa in A.D. 212–13, and Adiabene, which perhaps became the province of Assyria for a short time, beginning in A.D. 116). The conception of ten kings subordinate to the beast thus coheres with an informal political institution fostered by Rome during the late republican and early imperial periods. The Roman board of *decemviri*, 'ten men,' appointed in 451 B.C. to codify Roman law, is described in a famous inscription containing parts of a speech by Claudius as a 'tenfold kingship' (Dessau, ILS, 212).³⁸ [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 951.]

³⁵Note the use of μῆ ὥρα, in one hour, in 18:10, 17, 19 in reference to this same short period at the very end of time. These refer to the brief time required to completely devastate the city at the end.

³⁶Augustus had bestowed kingdoms on subordinate rulers (Res Gestae 33): 'The nations of the Parthians and Medes received their kings from my hand.' Later the emperor Gaius (A.D. 37–41) established six kings in the east, including Agrippa I (Jos. Ant. 18.237), Antiochus IV of Commagene and Cilicia (Dio Cassius 59.8.2; see Jos. J.W. 7.219ff., 234ff.), and Soemus of Iturea (Dio Cassius 59.12.2). Three sons of Antonia Tryphaena were established as kings of Armenia Minor, Thrace and Pontus, and the Bosphorus (Dio Cassius 59.12.2). On Roman kingmaking before the principate, see R. D. Sullivan, *Near Eastern Royalty and Rome*, 100–30 B.C. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990). The term ὥρα, literally 'hour' (and the Hebrew עֵת, literally 'time, season,' translated with ὥρα twenty-four times in the LXX), is frequently used for a short period of time and only rarely for the twelfth part of the day or night (cf. 3 Macc 5:13, 14; Matt 20:3, 5, 6, 9; 27:45; John 1:39; 4:6; Acts 2:15). The phrase μία ὥρα also occurs in 18:10, 17, 19, in the fixed phrase μῆ ὥρα, literally 'in one hour'; cf. Epictetus 1.15.8, where μῆ ὥρα is parallel to ἄφνω, 'suddenly.' The term 'hour' is also used for 'the time appointed by God' (Matt 24:36, 44, 50; 25:13).³⁷ [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 952.]

³⁷13 οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσίαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ διδῶσιν, 'They are of one accord and relinquish their power and authority to the beast.' As van Unnik ("MIA ΓΝΩΜΗ") has shown, this idiom is very nearly a technical term drawn from the sphere of politics and is part of the larger τοπος of ὁμόνοια, 'concord,' that happy state in which citizens are united in an agreement of thought and opinion, a condition for which people pray and which is thought to occur only through the intervention of the gods. μία γνώμη, 'one accord,' is used of concord within a

becomes united in its opposition to God and His people. But this unity and concord doesn't last long at all as vv. 16-17 will emphasize. It keeps the horns and the beast together but consolidates into a common hatred of the whore on the back of the beast that leads to her destruction.³⁸

c) οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί. **These will make war against the Lamb and the Lamb will be victorious over them, because He is Lord of lords and King of Kings, and those with Him are called and chosen and faithful** (v. 14).

Now the ultimate focus becomes clear for the beast and his client kings: to attack God and His people. This theme has surfaced previously and will surface again in Revelation: 16:14-16; 19:19; 20:8-9. In the background of this stands Ezek. 38:7-16; 39:2 and Psalm 2. Also similar is 1 Enoch 56:5-6; 4 Ezra. 13:33-34; Sib. Or. 3:663-68. Apocalyptic literature is a persecution literature that comes out of turbulent times of hardship for the people of God. Its foundation is the OT prophetic visionary literature of suffering for covenant Israel.

Inside Revelation this theme of conflict generally points to a great day of battle of the forces of evil with God through the Lamb. Initially it is spoken of in 16:14-16 as taking place at Harmagedon. In 17:14 this is re-enforced with the image of the beast and all his loyal supporters preparing for this battle. The battle is depicted in 19:19-21 as a crushing defeat for the beast

city or state (Dio Chrysostom Or. 36.22; 39.8; Isocrates Or. 4.138; Thucydides 1.122.2; 6.17.4; Demosthenes Or. 10.59), as well as of concord or unanimity between nations (Dionysius Hal. Ant. Rom. 6.77.1); for a collection of parallels, see van Unnik, "MIA ΓΝΩΜΗ," 211–18, and van der Horst, Aelius Aristides, 83–84. For an instance of five kings whose concord and mutual friendship were interpreted by the legatus of Syria, Domitius Marsus, as contrary to the interests of Rome, see Josephus Ant. 19.338–41. Ten different autonomous kings surrendered their power to the beast, not because they were forced but because they found themselves in full agreement with the beast. Yet Rev 17:17 indicates that it was through divine intervention that the miracle of a single opinion was achieved.

"There are a number of other idioms that express the unanimity of the will of a group of people: (1) αὐτὸς νοῦς, 'the same mind' (1 Cor 1:10); (2) αὐτὴ γνώμη, 'the same judgment' (1 Cor 1:10); (3) καρδιά μία, 'one heart' (Acts 4:23); (4) ψυχή μία, 'one mind' (Acts 4:32; Phil 1:27); (5) αὐτὸ πνεῦμα, 'one spirit' (2 Cor 12:18); (6) ἰσόψυχος, 'having the same attitude' (Phil 2:20); and (7) σύμψυχος, 'harmonious, one in mind' (Phil 2:2; see M. Silva, "Semantic Change and Semitic Influence in the Greek Bible," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1972, 147)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 952.]

³⁸Such imagery was easily understandable in John's day given the number of emperors who had invaded Rome in order to assume power over the empire.

and his followers which results into their being cast into the lake of fire. In 20:8-9 this same battle is depicted this time as a crushing defeat for Satan resulting in his being cast also into the lake of fire for eternal torments along with the two beasts. Then in 20:11-15, the massive final judgment takes place where all those whose names are not in the book of life are likewise banished to eternal torments in the lake of fire.

This repeated emphasis upon this last conflict between the forces of evil and God and His people underscores its significance in the message of hope to John's initial readers. Interestingly the battle turns out to not be any real battle.³⁹ In 19:15, 21, the Lamb now mounted on the white horse of triumphant victory strikes down the nations with His words. In 19:20 the two beasts are captured by Him and banished into the lake of fire. In 20:9, fire explodes from heaven upon the devil and his forces leading to their destruction in the lake of fire. With graphic, dramatic images John asserts the utter and complete destruction of all these forces, supernatural and human, that stand in opposition to God and His people.

The basis for the victory of the Lamb is ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, **because He is Lord of Lords and King of kings.** In 19:16 these two titles⁴⁰ surface

³⁹Bauchham has suggested that eschatological holy-war traditions took two forms (Bauchham, "The Apocalypse as a Christian War Scroll," in *Climax*, 210–11). In one form the victory is won by God alone or by God accompanied by his heavenly armies (the tradition that predominates in apocalyptic), which I will call the *passive model*, while in the other the people of God play an active role in physical warfare against their enemies (a striking example of which is found in 1QM), which I will call the *active model*. The few apocalyptic texts in which the righteous act as agents of divine retribution include 1 Enoch 90:19; 91:12; 95:3, 7; 96:1; 98:12; Jub. 23:30; Apoc. Abr. 29.17–20; cf. 1 Cor 6:2–3. While it is not explicitly said that 'those with him' participate in the battle, this seems to be implied, making this brief narrative an example of the active model of the final eschatological battle. With the possible exception of this verse, most apocalyptic texts that depict the final eschatological war tend to emphasize the passive model, i.e., the role of God and his angels in the eschatological battle, ignoring the role, if any, of the people of God in the conflict. (For an argument that the saints are enjoined to seek vengeance on their enemies in Rev 18:6–7, see S. M. Elliott, "Who Is Addressed in Revelation 18:6–7?" BR 40 [1995] 98–113.) 1QM is the most striking example in Jewish eschatological literature of the active model of the eschatological war, while Revelation reflects a much more complex combination of sometimes contradictory eschatological perspectives. The active model is reflected (or presupposed) in Rev 7:1–9; 14:1–5; 17:14, while the passive model appears in Rev 16:12–16; 19:11–21; 20:8–9." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 956.]

⁴⁰The title 'King of kings' is also applied to Yahweh in early Jewish literature (2 Macc 13:4; 3 Macc 5:35; 1 Enoch 9:4; 63:4; 84:2; 1QM 14:16; 4Q491 = 4QMa frags. 8–10, line 13; 4Q381 = 4QNon-Canonical Psalms B frags. 76–77, line 7; Philo Spec. Leg. 1.18; Decal. 41; T. Mos. 8:1). It is also a title for God found in the

Mishnah (m. Sanh. 4:5), as is the even more comprehensive title 'King of kings of kings' (m. 'Abot 3:1; 4:22; Ma'aseh Merkavah §§ 551, 552, 555, 558; see Swartz, Prayer, 119 n. 40). Other relevant parallels in the OT and early Jewish literature include Deut 10:17, 'For the Lord our God, he is God of gods and Lord of lords'; Ps 136:3, 'Lord of lords'; LXX Dan 11:36, 'God of gods'; Bel 7, 'God of gods'; 1 Enoch 63:2, 'Lord of kings'; 63:4, 'Now we realize that we ought to praise and bless the Lord of kings and the one who is king over all kings'; 63:7, 'Lord of kings'; 84:2, 'King of kings' (cf. Bousset-Gressmann, Religion des Judentums, 313 n. 2).

"The title 'King of kings' has strong Near Eastern associations, and its origin is often traced to Achaemenid Persia and the phrase *χšayaθiya χšayaθiyanam*, 'king of kings,' found in the Behistan inscription (CAH 4:185; v. Schoeffer, PW vol. 5 [1897] 80–81). The later Parthian kings also described themselves using this title (E. H. Minns, "Parchments of the Parthian Period from Arroman in Kurdistan," JHS 35 [1915] 38–39). The Parthian king Phraates III was accustomed to being addressed as 'king of kings,' though Pompey refused to use this title; i.e., he dropped 'of kings' in letters to Phraates, thereby insulting him (Plutarch Pompey 38.2; Dio Cassius 37.6.1–3). It was against this background that Antony proclaimed his two sons by Cleopatra to be 'kings of kings' (Plutarch Antony 54.4) when he made them rulers over Armenia, Media, and Parthia. The title *šar šarrani*, 'king of kings,' is also attested in Assyrian sources, where it is a title of both Assyrian gods and kings (Griffiths, CP 48 [1953] 148). The title 'king of kings' is also used of Egyptian pharaohs (Griffiths, CP 48 [1953] 150–51), and Deissmann cites evidence showing that the title was used of royalty in Armenia, the Bosphorus, and Palmyra (Deissmann, Light, 368). The title 'lord of kings' (מַלְכֵי מַלְכֵי *mālē' malkin*) was applied to the Egyptian Pharaoh in a seventh-century B.C. Aramaic letter (A1.1, lines 1, 6 in Porten-Yardeni, Textbook 1:6). It is often claimed that the titles 'great king' and 'king of kings' had precise political significance in terms of territorial sovereignty. Griffiths argues that the titles were originally used of deities and that they were only later and secondarily applied to earthly kings (CP 48 [1953] 152). The Greek inscription of the decree of Darius Hystaspes (521–486 B.C.), addressed to the satrap Gadatas, begins with the title βασιλεῦ [βα]σιλέων, 'king of kings' (Meiggs-Lewis, Inscriptions, no. 12). The ancient Persian title for king, *χšayaθiya χšayaθiyanam*, 'king of kings,' is reflected in those parts of the OT that were composed during the Persian period (539–332 B.C.); cf. S. A. Cook, *A Glossary of the Aramaic Inscriptions* (Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1974) 77.

"In the OT and the Jewish apocrypha, the title 'king of kings' is used in two ways (Griffiths, CP 48 [1953] 151): (1) as a designation assumed by Neo-Babylonian kings (e.g., of Nebuchadrezzar in Ezek 26:7 and Dan 2:37) and (2) as a designation of Persian kings (Artaxerxes in Ezra 7:12). Titles of this type are not strictly limited to Jewish and ancient Near Eastern sources, however. Zeus is called βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, 'king of kings,' in Dio Chrysostom (Or. 2.75), and ἄναξ ἀνάκτων, 'king of kings,' in Aeschylus Suppl. 524, which, however, has a superlative meaning since it is parallel to the phrase μακάρων μακάρτατε, 'most blessed of the blessed ones [i.e., 'the gods']' (Aeschylus Suppl. 524–25). Yet it is true that the Greeks were most familiar with the title as one used by the Persians (Griffiths, CP 48 [1953] 146). Several parallels also occur in the Greek magical papyri, primarily in invocations; cf. PGM II.53, 'god of gods, king of kings'; PGM XIII.605, 'king of kings, tyrant of tyrants'; and PGM XIII.606, βασιλεῦ βασιλέων, τύραννε τυράννων, 'king of kings, tyrant of tyrants' (two objective genitives indicating that this divine king reigns over all other kings

in reverse order to here: βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων, *King of kings and Lord of lords*.⁴¹ In this later depiction these titles are written both on his garments and on His thigh: καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον. The functional impact is a further linking of chapters seventeen and nineteen together. The point of the titles is to underscore the full authority of the Lamb as divine and thus all powerful.

With the Lamb are His people described here uniquely as οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί, *those with Him are called and chosen and faithful*. Such a depiction is only found here in the book of Revelation and this tyrant reigns over all other tyrants). The magical name 'Marmaroth,' found in Greek transliteration as ΜΑΡΜΑΡΑΙΩΘ or ΜΑΡΜΑΡΑΩΘ (and other spelling variations), occurs with some frequency in magical texts and particularly on magical gems and is based on an Aramaic phrase מר מרות מר *mār mārūtā*, meaning 'lord of lords,' or מר מאורות מר *mār mē'ôrôt*, 'lord of lights' (Hopfner, *offenbarungszauber*, vol. 1, § 746; Kroll, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 3:124–25; Peterson, *Εἷς Θεός*, 307–8; Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 154, 182–83; Philipp, *Mira et Magica*, 47, no. 41; cf. Delatte-Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, no. 320; Naveh-Shaked, *Amulets*, Amulet 4, lines 24–25). The same Aramaic phrase is found in the magical papyri, e.g., Θεε θεῶν, Μαρ μαριῶ Ἰάω, 'God of gods, Lord of lords, Iad' (PGM IV.1201; cf. IV.366; XII.72, 187, 289; XLIII.7). The even more comprehensive phrase 'king of kings of kings [מלכי המלכי מל *melek malkē hammēlakīm*]' frequently occurs in rabbinic literature (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 791a) and also as a divine title on Jewish magical amulets (Naveh-Shaked, *Amulets*, Amulet 1, line 24; Amulet 12, line 20)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 954–955.]

⁴¹Additional occurrences of these titles applied either to Christ or to God surface both inside the NT and in the apocalyptic literature outside the NT.

In 1 Tim 6:15, a similar double title, "King of kings and Lord of lords [ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων]," is applied to God (nb. the close parallel with the Greek version of 1 Enoch 9:4, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων, "King of kings"). The title occurs in a polemical context in Acts Scill. 6, where the martyr Speratus, asked by proconsul P. Vigellius Saturninus to swear by the genius of the emperor, replies (tr. Musurillo, *Acts*), "I acknowledge my lord who is the emperor of kings [imperatorem regum] and of all nations" (three MSS have the reading regem regum et imperatorem, "king of kings and emperor"). In Pr. Paul I A.14, Jesus Christ is called (tr. J. M. Robinson, *Nag Hammadi*, 27) "[the Lord] of Lords, the King of the ages." This double title first appears in early Jewish literature in 1 Enoch 9:4, where it is applied to God: (ὁ) κύριος τῶν κυρίων καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων, "Lord of lords and King of kings." The Ethiopic text may be translated (Knibb, *Enoch*, 85–86) "Lord of Lords, God of Gods, King of Kings!" Black emends the text, in light of the Aramaic fragments, to read "Lord of the ages, Lord of lords and God of gods and King of the ages" (1 Enoch, 29), suggesting that the phrases "Lord of lords" and "God of gods" were added in the Greek and Ethiopic texts through dependence on such OT titles as those found in LXX (Deut 10:17; Ezek 26:7; Dan 2:37; Ezra 7:12; see Black, 1 Enoch, 130).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 953]

tion, even though the various terms surface individually elsewhere inside the NT.

The angel's explanation of this second part, while not pushing the reader into a riddle to be solved as with the first part, does require interpretive reading of the associates of the beast against the backdrop of the client kings of the Roman empire during the first couple of centuries. In a very creative manner, we are reminded of the massive gathering of all the peoples of the earth in opposition to God and His people during that final surge of evil just before the very end.

B. The angel's explanation, part two, vv. 15-18.

15 Καὶ λέγει μοι· τὰ ὕδατα ἃ εἶδες οἷ ἢ πόρνη κάθεται, λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλώσσαι. 16 καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες καὶ τὸ θηρίον οὗτοι μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην καὶ ἠρημωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν καὶ γυμνήν καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται καὶ αὐτὴν κατακάουσιν ἐν πυρὶ. 17 ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἔδωκεν εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ καὶ ποιῆσαι μίαν γνώμην καὶ δοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ ἄχρι τελεσθήσονται οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ.

18 καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἣν εἶδες ἔστιν ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη ἡ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

15 And he said to me, "The waters *that you saw*, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

18 The woman *you saw* is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Almost with an O'Henry ironic twist, the angel provides a part two explanation that now centers on the woman astride the beast. The image of her on the beast's back suggests her dependence upon it as the evil ruler of the empire in league with the Devil himself. But this is not a solid connection between the woman and the beast.

1) The hatred of the woman, vv. 15-17. The first part of this second explanation contains a big surprise. First, an allegorical interpretation of the initial image of the woman sitting ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, *upon many waters*, in v. 1b which has been largely ignored until now in the text. The focus throughout most of the chapter has been the woman sitting upon the beast, not on the large body of waters.

But now the angel comes back to this first image of the meaning of ὑδάτων πολλῶν which now is simply called τὰ ὕδατα (v. 15a). Their meaning is explained as λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλώσσαι, *peoples and*

crowds and nations and languages. That is equal to *οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, those dwelling upon the earth*, in v. 8b. But the characterization of the people of the world as *τὰ ὕδατα, the waters*, has an OT background in Isa. 8:6-8 and Jer. 47:2 where waters is a metaphor for an invading foreign army.⁴²

The point of this interpretation of the woman sitting on the many waters is to stress her dependency upon the peoples of the world for her power and wealth. The people and her dependency then logically turns into her sitting on the back of the beast, since it is through his control of all these people that she acquires this power and wealth.

But this alliance between the ten horns and the beast with the woman is not stable and a given. As the angel then declares in v. 16, *καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες καὶ τὸ θηρίον οὗτοι μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην καὶ ἡρηνωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν καὶ γυμνήν καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται καὶ αὐτήν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρὶ, and the ten horns which you saw and the beasts, these despise the whore and they will make her desolate and the woman and her flesh they will devour and her they will burn with fire*. In chapter 18, the details of this will be put on the table with these destroyers of the woman having contradictory emotions about destroying her. In the background here is the image of Jerusalem as a woman stripped down naked for humiliating destruction in Ezek. 23:26-29. The survivors in Jerusalem will be burned with fire in Ezek. 23:25. The threat of stripping down a city pictured as a whore to nakedness in anticipation of destruction is found in several texts of the OT: Jer 13:26-27; Ezek 16:37-38; 23:10, 29; Hos 2:5, 12 and Nah 3:5; cf. Isa 3:17; 47:3; Jer 13:22; Lam 1:8.⁴³

Now we since part of the reason for picturing Rome as a whore. There is never a solid relationship between a whore and her clients. Both are using each other with no commitment to or positive feelings for one another. This is the picture of Rome and her relationship with both the emperors and the people of the empire. It was a continual love / hate relationship. The popularity of the myth of Nero's resurrection from the dead and return from the east with the armies of the Parthians to capture Rome fed this image substantially in John's

⁴²In Isa 8:6-8 and Jer 47:2, 'waters' is a metaphor for an invading foreign army; in Isa 8:7, the phrase *הנהר מי מֵהַנְּהָר* *mē hannāhār*, 'waters of the river,' undoubtedly refers to the Euphrates and symbolizes the nations east and north of that great river. A similar metaphor is used of the Persian army in Aeschylus Persians 87-92. In 4Q169 = 4QNahum Peshier frags. 1-2, lines 3-4, the 'sea' of Nah 1:4 is interpreted to mean the Kittim (= Romans). On the four ethnic groups used to emphasize universality, see Comment on 5:9." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 956.]

⁴³David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 957.

day. This will continue to be the case throughout the remainder of human history between evil rulers and the people they rule with the centers of power from which these rulers operate.

The very gruesome actions of *ἡρηνωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν καὶ γυμνήν καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται καὶ αὐτήν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρὶ, they will make her desolate and the woman and her flesh they will devour and her they will burn with fire*, were rather standard depictions of the ravages of warfare in the ancient world. It could have easily described Jerusalem with the Roman destruction of the city in 70 AD.

The foundation of this turmoil described in v. 16 is given in v. 17: *ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἔδωκεν εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ καὶ ποιῆσαι μίαν γνώμην καὶ δοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ ἄχρι τελεσθῆσονται οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ. For God put into their hearts his purpose and it as one intent and gave their kingdom to the beast until the words of God should be completed.*⁴⁴ A threefold purpose action of ποιῆσαι / δοῦναι, *to do / to give*, defines the core verb ἔδωκεν, *He gave*, in the sentence. First is ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ, *to do His intention*. Thus behind the decision by the beast and his cohorts to destroy the woman stands God putting this decision into their decision making (*εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν*). Second, is καὶ ποιῆσαι μίαν γνώμην, *to do this with one accord*. Out of the many things they might have disagreed about, their unified decision was to destroy the woman. Third, δοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ ἄχρι τελεσθῆσονται οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ, *to give their kingdom to the beast until the words of the God should be completed*. Their yielding to the control of the beast came ultimately from God. But it was not to be a permanent surrender. It would last only as long as God said that it would.

This highly Hebraic way of expressing an idea in this sentence has some parallels in both the OT and more often in near Eastern texts in various Semitic languages.⁴⁵ John's clear point is that behind the evil de-

⁴⁴ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἔδωκεν εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ, 'For God prompted them to do his will.' V 17 provides a commentary on some, but not all, of the events predicted in vv 12-16. This commentary is expressed through three infinitive clauses, all objects of the verb ἔδωκεν, 'prompted': (1) ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ, 'to do his will' (v 17a), (2) ποιῆσαι μίαν γνώμην, 'to be in one accord' (v 17b), and (3) δοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ, 'to surrender their royal power to the beast' (v 17b). The first infinitive clause ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ, 'to do his will,' is very general in nature and reveals that the events predicted in vv 12-16 are all controlled by the sovereign will and purpose of God, while the next two clauses are more specific (see below)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 957-958.]

⁴⁵The phrase *διδόναι εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν*, literally 'to put into their hearts,' is a Semitic idiom not found elsewhere in Revelation, but it occurs a few times in the OT and more frequently in ancient Near Eastern texts. In Neh 2:12; 7:5 the phrase *נָתַן אֶל־לִבְבִי*

cisions made by the beast and his royal cohorts stands the controlling will of God. They will do nothing outside of that divine will. Inside that divine plan they can make their evil decisions but He limits what they can do so that ultimately they fulfill His plan for human history.

The final phrase ἄχρι τελεσθήσονται οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ, until the words of God be completed, is paralleled by καὶ ἐτελέσθη τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, ὡς εὐηγγέλισεν τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ δούλους τοὺς προφῆτας, and the mystery of God will be completed as announced to His servants the prophets in 10:7b. Although people and supernatural evil beings have freedom to make choices, these must be made within the framework of God's eternal plan for His creation. No one ever usurps His authority or control ultimately over all things.

2) The identity of the woman, v. 18. Finally after waiting for the entire chapter we learn the identity of the woman: καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἣν εἶδες ἔστιν ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη ἡ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, and the woman which you saw is the great city which possesses rule over the kings of the earth. The angel doesn't directly say Rome here, but every reader in John's circle of readers would have thought this.⁴⁶ But in so framing the identity

nātan 'el lēbāb, 'to put in the heart,' refers to the divine guidance given to Nehemiah in his plans for Jerusalem (the same idiom occurs in Exod 35:30–35, esp. v 34; Ezra 7:27; 1 Esdr 8:25). For additional parallels, see G. von Rad, "Die Nehemia-Denkschrift," ZAW 76 (1964) 176–87. The eight parallels he cites are from late Egyptian inscriptions (twenty-second to twenty-sixth dynasties) collected and discussed in Otto, *Die biographischen Inschriften*, 22, 141, 148–49, 158, 162–63, 177–78, 184; e.g., 22, 'I have daily done what your Ka loves, because you have put it into my heart,' and 148–49, 'God put it in my heart to make my life on earth glorious.' These inscriptions frequently reflect the idea that good or evil action depends on a god who puts good or evil thoughts into the heart of a person (Otto, *Inscriben*, 21–22). The idiom also occurs in 1QpHab 2:8, where the Teacher of Righteousness is described as 'the priest into whose heart God placed understanding [הַיְהוֹדָה (ב לא הַת רשא לברו בין) *hakkôhên 'ăšer nātan 'el bē(libbô bînāh)* to interpret all the words of his servants the prophets."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 958.]

⁴⁶While 'the great city' is applied to Jerusalem in 11:8 (see Comment), in Rev 17–18 the phrase 'the great city' refers clearly to Rome, implicitly or explicitly designated 'Babylon' (17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21; cf. 16:19). While various other ancient cities were variously designated 'the great city' (see Comment on 11:8), it was inevitable that the title, either implicitly or explicitly, would be applied to Rome. Rome was called *princeps urbium*, 'the greatest of cities' (Horace Carm. 4.3.13), and Aelius Aristides referred to her as ἡ μεγάλη πόλις, 'the great city' (Or. 26.3; cf. 26.9). See also the extensive collection of texts in Neuer Wettstein, ad Rev 17:18 (Dio Cassius 76.4.4–5; Anth. Pal. 9.236; Dion Periegetes 352–56; Athenaeus 1.208b; 3.98c; Porphyry De abst. 2.56.9 [ἡ μεγάλη πόλις]; Procopius Goth. 3.22; Vergil Aeneid 1.601–6; 7.272–82; Eclogues 1.19–25; Livy 1.16.6–7; Ovid Fasti 5.91–100; Metam. 15.439–49; Manilius 4.686–95, 773–77; Pliny Hist. nat. 3.38; Silius 3.505–10, 582–87; Martial 1.3.1–6; 10.103.7–12; Ammianus Marc. 14.6.5–

of Rome this way we are reminded that Rome is a symbol of an evil power controlling the world through her leader, the beast, and then through the client rulers, the ten horns. The last of these rulers, the fifth head, will rise up on concerted opposition to God and His people at the very end of time. But God through the divine power of the Lamb will destroy all by His words coming as a fiery sword out of His mouth.

This destruction of the city pictured as a woman will be described in great detail in chapter eighteen. Perhaps the placing of her identity after that of the beast is intentionally done in order to prepare the readers for this description in chapter eighteen.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What can we learn from the angel's interpretation of the beast and of the woman? In how the angel goes about interpreting these two in vv. 8-18 reminds us clearly that God is not going to do all the work of interpretation for us as readers. As the formula statement in v. 9a reminds us, we must depend upon God's wisdom made available to us in our thinking to figure out the spiritual principles that stand behind all these images. Reading a multitude of commentaries on this passage convinces me that the majority of commentators depended on their own thinking rather than seeking the wisdom of God in understanding this passage. Only isolated ones seemingly bothered to get God's help in making their interpretation.

The angel's interpretation gives us signals that point us a certain direction in understanding the text. And it is being able to think like God thinks (ὡς οὐκ ἔχων σοφίαν, v. 9a) that gives application meaning of these signals to us as readers. And when this meaning begins to soak into our minds, WOW!

God has a grand scheme for ending up things on earth before ushering in the eternal order. Parts of it are not pleasant. Evil in a concentrated manner will make one final push to disrupt God's plan and harm His people. But all this accomplishes is their eternal damnation in the lake of fire and the ushering in of the blessings of Heaven for the people of God. And in that we can rejoice, as is celebrated in the heavenly chants of celebration provided in chapters eighteen and nineteen.

6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 959.]