

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 131:  
“Revelation 17 and the Papacy”**

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**“The Bible and Race”**

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A popular marketing strategy is to sell “two for the price of one.” This newsletter is even better, because it offers you two Bible studies at no cost. What happened? My original intent was to post only Prof. Jon Paulien’s essay “Revelation 17 and the Papacy.” Incidentally, Paulien deserves our heartfelt appreciation for taking time in his busy schedule to devote a whole week in preparing a well-thought out essay. This study should help many Adventists to avoid the danger of reading into Revelation 17 their gratuitous assumptions.

What changed my original plan, is the numerous comments I received about my report on the situation in South Africa. Some were offended by my observations about the situation in the church and in the country. For example, my comment that Helderberg has become a black college and the white students have no white college to attend, was interpreted to mean that black students have forced white students out of the school.

Obviously, that is not what I meant. Black students have never forced white students out of any Adventist College. The reality is that when a College becomes predominantly or exclusively black, white students go to another college where their race is adequately represented. This gives them a better chance to date and marry within their own race. This is what is happening in America, as explained later. The problem is that in South Africa white students do not have the option to attend another Adventist college that is predominantly white.

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Another comment that was misinterpreted is my reference to the pressure of the South African Union to merge together the black and white conferences. I found that our leaders and pastors of the Transvaal Conference are very apprehensive about this development. The fact is that in America, black Adventists have chosen to organize themselves in separate regional conferences. In California where black churches do not have a separate regional conference, in recent years repeated attempts have been made by some black leaders to organize their own separate regional conference.

If the policy adopted by the Southern Africa Union to merge black and white conferences, was to be implemented in the United States, by pressuring, for example, the Michigan Conference to merge with the Lake Region Conference, the result would be an upheaval. The reason is that experience has shown that black and white conferences serve better the needs of their constituency, when they are organized as independent conferences.

### **Objectives of this Study on the Bible and Race**

The purpose of this Bible study is to look at the present racial situation from a biblical perspective. The popular assumption seems to be that the Bible does not sanction the existence of churches or conferences divided along racial lines. Since we are one family in Christ, ethnic and racial distinctions should be abolished and a full integration should be achieved.

Is this what the Bible teaches? Is this what Paul meant when he said that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female” (Gal 3:28)? Did the Apostolic Church understand this text to mean that the ethnic distinctions between Jews and Gentiles were abolished and consequently believers should function as ONE integrated church?

These are some of the questions that I intend to address in this Bible study. I must confess that I had only few days to think about these questions. I read as much as I could, but the studies I found, seem to jump to the immediate conclusion that unity in Christ means the aboli-

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tion of all racial, cultural, and ethnic distinctions. I have not yet found a scholarly study that examines the race question in the context of the biblical teaching regarding the gender and racial distinctions that God has established for the orderly functioning of the human family. In view of the time limitations, my Bible study represents initial reflections that may well need to be modified during the course of a more comprehensive study. Your comments will help me to see what I have missed.

### **SPECIAL ONE TIME GC OFFER ON HITACHI PROJECTORS**

In the last newsletter I informed you that in occasion of the forthcoming General Conference Session in St. Louis, (June 29 to July 9, 2005), the HITACHI Corporation of North America has agreed to offer their lines of projectors at a special ONE TIME OFFER, to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries.

For example, the SPECIAL GC OFFER on the HITACHI 2000 LUMENS CP-X328 HIGH RESOLUTION, is only \$1,495.00, instead of the factory suggested retail price of \$7,495.00. This projector has WON THE AWARD of the best projector in its class. Over 500 churches and schools have bought this projector for \$2000.00, that is \$500.00 more than the GC SPECIAL OFFER.

A similar discount is offered on all the HITACHI models, ranging from 1200 to 4500 lumens. Feel free to contact me by email or phone (269) 471-2915, and I will give you the special GC price on the model you wish to purchase. I will be glad to deliver you the projector at my GC BOOTH No. 33 and you can pay at that time.

**THIS IS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO PURCHASE AN OUTSTANDING PROJECTOR AT A BARGAIN PRICE AND TAKE IT BACK HOME WITHOUT PAYING HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS OF FEDEX AND CUSTOMS**

### **SPECIAL ONE TIME GC OFFER ON DVD/VIDEO SEMINARS**

In occasion of the General Conference Session, I am offering for only \$60.00, postage paid, my DVD or VIDEO ALBUM containing 10

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live, dynamic PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent which I present worldwide. The regular price of the album is \$150.00. The VIDEO ALBUM has the same 10 PowerPoint messages, but its price is only \$35.00, postage paid, because we need to reduce our inventory.

The recording was done few months ago by a TV crew at the brand new Michiana-FilAm SDA Church at Andrews University. The quality of the taping is exceptionally good, especially since the editor, Lawrence Brown, a former student of mine who works for Channel 16 of Notre Dame University, spent a month to insert manually each of the 1000 PowerPoint slides used for the 10 lectures.

These 10 PowerPoint lectures include the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on the change of the Sabbath. You will see important documents and leading popes who influenced the change of the Sabbath. People who cannot attend my weekend seminars, can now enjoy my Sabbath/Advent messages in their homes and share them with their congregation.

If you plan to attend the General conference, you can purchase the DVD ALBUM for \$60.00 or VIDEO ALBUM for \$35.00, at my BOOTH No. 33 which is located on the “AISLE 00” that runs from the Adventist Bookstore at the one end of the isle, to the Exhibit Hall “1” at the other end. If you are unable to attend the GC, feel free to call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at [sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com) We guarantee to process your order immediately.

### **ARE YOU LOOKING FOR AN EXCELLENT REMOTE FOR YOUR POWER POINT PRESENTATIONS?**

If you are looking for an outstanding Remote for your PowerPoint presentations, you will be pleased to know HONEYWELL has just come out with the smallest and most powerful remote in the market. You can view it at <http://www.powerremote.com/>

The size of the transmitter is smaller than a credit card. You can stick it inside the palm of your hand and nobody can see it. The operating distance between the remote and the receiver is officially 150 feet. But I

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tested the remote in an open environment, and the radio signal can go up to 400 feet of distance. IT IS INCREDIBLE! The transmitter has three buttons: forward, backward, and laser.

The brand new model is hard to find in the market, but I signed a contract with HONEYWELL to distribute it to our churches and schools. By buying 50 units at a time, I can offer this incredible remote for only \$120.00, postage paid. To order a remote, call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at [sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com)

### **BED AND BREAKFAST IN LONDON, ENGLAND**

If you are planning to travel to London, England in the near future, you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple who offer the best bed and breakfast service you can find in London for only £20.00 a day. I stayed with this couple numerous times and they have always treated me so well that I promised to announce their services in this newsletter. They have three nice guest rooms, a lovely garden, and a modern bathroom. The home is close to Heathrow airport and at a walking distance from the Subway. You will be treated royally at a bargain price. You can see the pictures and read the details at my website <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm> You can contact Gary and Araxi by phone 020 8866 8821 or email <[gary@advent.plus.com](mailto:gary@advent.plus.com)>

### **AN INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA CD-ROM OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY**

Have you ever wished that you could see the unfolding of the Great Controversy during the history of Christianity? This has been the dream of Gerard Damsteegt, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. With the help of competent people who worked with him during the past 8 years and the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, Damsteegt has produced a CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

The simplest way for me to describe this multimedia CD-ROM is for you to imagine having 100 documentaries compressed in one disk.

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You are guided through a virtual tour and given the opportunity to click what you want to watch or read. For example, if you want to see the Destruction of Jerusalem, or the Persecution of the Christians, just click, and you can watch factual documentaries. You are in for months of pleasurable learning. Church leaders and Bible teachers in different parts of the world have emailed me messages of appreciation for this incredible multimedia presentation of the Great Controversy experience.

Read the rest of the story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/TheGreatControversyExp.htm>. If you have a problem ordering this marvellous CD-ROM through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and AIRMAIL you immediately this fantastic multimedia interactive CD-ROM.

### **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of June and July 2005. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

#### **JUNE 17-18: LOMA LINDA FILIPINO & ROMANIAN CHURCHES**

Location: Loma Linda Filipino SDA Church, 11180 New Jersey Street, Redlands, CA 92373. For information call Pastor Armando Fabella at (909) 790-8171 or (909) 798-3822.

Loma Linda Romanian SDA Church, 26271 Mayberry Street, Loma Linda, CA (2354). For information call Pastor Nicolae Butoiu at (909) 799-8523.

#### **JUNE 28 to JULY 11: GENERAL CONFERENCE IN ST. LOUIS**

Location of **BOOTH**: My BOOTH number is 33. It is located on the “AISLE 00” that runs from the Adventist Bookstore at the one end of the isle, to the Exhibit Hall “1” at the other end. If you want to reach me on my cellular phone, my number is (269) 208-1942. I look forward to meet many of you. Feel free to stop by to renew our acquaintaince.

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**JULY 22: HAMBURG GHANAIAN SDA CHURCH - GERMANY**

Location: Charlottenstrasse 24A. (About 200 meters from U2 Emillienstrasse banhof).

For information call Pastor Nyamaah Elijah at 4040197131

**JULY 23: KRELLIGEN GHANAIAN SDA CHURCH - NEAR HANNOVER**

For location and information, call Pastor Charles Dediako at 7115059807.

**“The Bible and Race”**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,**

**Retired Professor of Theology and Church History**

**Andrews University**

The last newsletter taught me that popularity is transitory, ephemeral. In Christ’s life, some of the same people who wanted to crown Him king at His triumphant entry in Jerusalem, few days later shouted: “Crucify Him!” Translated to my own experience, some of the subscribers who praised my scholarship in the past, after reading my comments about South Africa, they dismissed me as a racist.

It takes very little to change the mood of people from the commendation to condemnation of a person. In the case of the last ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 13 “Church Growth Experiments in Secular Australia,” all what it took was my few personal observations on the religious, social and political situation in South Africa. Some interpreted my comments as an indictment of the new South African Government, our current South African Adventist leaders, and the black race in general. None of these things have ever entered my mind.

As I travel around the world, I often share my personal observations on what I witness and experience inside the church and outside in socio-political situation of the country. My comments are based on personal observations, not in depth investigations. They are meant to be informative, not accusative.

What I wrote in my report about my South African lecture tour was simply based on what I saw, heard, and read during the 20 days I spent in that country. I never intended to defame the new government, or to criticize our Adventist leaders, or to disparage the black race.

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The accusation that I am a racist, is totally unfounded, because I have always accepted people of all races. At Newbold I shared the same room with a fine Ethiopian. During the Summer I canvassed in Scotland with a genuine Christian brother from Nigeria, We slept in the same small room, rubbing shoulders every day, without engendering ill-feeling. In fact, we prayed together and supported one another. Later I served for five years in Ethiopia as Bible and history teacher. I came to love the students so much, that in addition to teaching I worked hard to develop a pipe-furniture industry which helped over 50 students every Summer to earn in full their school expenses.

During the past 30 years I have preached in small and large black churches in America and overseas. Black members usually give me the warmest reception and response. My ministry is widely accepted by Adventist believers of all races. This was especially true during my recent lecture tour in South Africa.

For 20 days I spoke every single day, sometimes to two or three different congregations. The churches were packed to capacity and the warm reception and response warmed my heart. A gage of the interest is the unprecedented number of orders received. I do not recall having ever received so many orders for my publications and recordings in any country that I have visited during the past 30 years of itinerant ministry. Truly, I can say that I found ALL South Africans believers, White, Colored, and Black, most eager to deepen their understanding and experience of biblical truths. They need our prayers and encouragement, as they are called to live and share their faith at a turbulent time of the history of their nation.

## **THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATION OF SOUTH AFRICA**

The social, economic, and political situation of the new South Africa is evident for anyone to see. I reported what I saw and heard, not to be critical, but to be compassionate toward the sufferings experienced by many. Shanty towns dot the country side, crime is one of the highest in the world, fear is the daily reality, unemployment is at an all time high. Several black and white South Africans have told me that about 70 of the population is unemployed. Desperate people are trying to scrape a living



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by selling anything at street intersections. The day laborers with whom I spoke told me that they make only \$200.00 a month. They also told me that illegal immigrants work even for \$100.00 a month.

I was shocked by the poverty, crime, corruption, discrimination, and incompetence of government officials. It took one hour for three custom officers to prepare an invoice for me to pay the VAT for my books at the Johannesburg airport. One officer started the invoice. When he got stuck another continued, and finally a third one finished. Note that this happened, not out in the sticks, but at the Johannesburg International airport. This first impression made me immediately aware of the incompetence and inefficiency that exists in the new South Africa.

### **The Threat of Poverty and Unemployment**

An article I read in the Johannesburg newspaper, *Star*, compared the high rate of unemployment and poverty to a time bomb ready to explode at any time. The reason is, as the article puts it, that desperate people do desperate things. This is exemplified in the incredible number of stories I heard about cars being high jacked and drivers being killed at street intersections. It almost seems that every person with whom I talked, had a story to tell me about themselves, family members, or friends who have been victims of crime. A pastor came to pick me up late for my speaking appointment, because he had to visit at the hospital a sister whose car had been high jacked and she had been shot. The bullet damaged her spine and kidney and she will be paralyzed for life.

Even in the parking lot of the Bassonia SDA Church, (which is an English-speaking mixed congregation, not Afrikaans as I erroneously stated in my previous newsletter) two cars were stolen and one was broken into during the last night I spoke there. I have never seen so many security devises installed in cars as required by insurance companies.

At the South African Union flat where I stayed for four days, I needed 2 remotes to open the gates and three keys to unlock the door of the apartment. The door and the windows were protected by iron bars. Even at Helderberg College the entrance to the guest rooms is protected by a steel door that must be unlocked in order to access the wooden door.

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The windows of the room also have iron bars. I felt like living in a high security prison. This is what I saw and experience in the new South Africa.

The situation today is much different from what I saw during my previous two visits. From my hotel I used to walk at night without fear through the Cape Town city center. This time the hotel security service warned me not to go out for a walk at night, because I may never return alive.

Some blame the past Apartheid policies for all the problems the country is facing today. There is no questions that some problems are the legacy of the Apartheid political administration. But the new South African government has been in power for the past 11 years now. My impression is that during this period the situation has deteriorated.

What I have been told by non-Adventist business men I met at the hotel and in the airplane (I was upgraded free to business class), is that it has become very difficult for foreign companies to establish new manufacturing industries in South Africa. The reason is the requirement of joint-ownership with a black South African who must own 51% without paying a cent. A business man told me that in order for his company to operate in Port Elizabeth they had to set up an office for a black South African, who was paid to do nothing, except to provide his name in order for the company to be legal. Such a policy hardly encourages foreign companies to build manufacturing plants to take advantage of the cheap labor force

The issue is not whether the government is black or white, but whether it is capable to govern the country effectively, encouraging industrial growth, generating new jobs, and improving the standard of living of its citizens. From what I have seen and heard, this does not seem to be happening in South Africa in this moment. Black and white brain power is living the country. I learned this past week that over half a million black and white skilled South Africans have immigrated to the USA during the past few years. The situation is gradually deteriorating, risking to become similar to Zimbabwe.

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To be politically correct, I should have ignored the problems and write a glowing report about the positive things that I saw. But, I am committed to tell the truth, even when it is unpleasant. This applies to biblical teachings as well as to the socio-political situation of a country.

The result has been that I often found myself in the crossfire of controversy. But controversy can be healthy, when it challenges us to think. Sylvan Lashley, former President of Caribbean Union College, Atlantic Union College, and currently serving as an Attorney, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to dialogue on the race issue and encouraged me to study the issue from a biblical perspective. This essay represents a small beginning.

### **SOME BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RACE ISSUE**

Some have accused me of being racist because in my newsletters I did not decry the flight of white students from Helderberg College, which has become a black college. The assumption seems to be that white students should have no problem to study in at a predominant or total black institution, because the acceptance of the Gospel eliminates all racial, ethnic, and social distinctions. This popular belief has been expressed in several of the messages I received.

In spite of its popularity, this teaching is foreign to the Bible. My initial research indicates that Bible teaches us to accept and respect people of all races and cultures, but it does not teach to ignore all racial and ethnic distinctions. The text usually quoted to argue for racial integration is Galatians 3:28, which says: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Some focus on the Greek/Jew aspect of this text to argue that in Christ all races should be melded into one people. The problem with such a reasoning is the failure to recognize that the text affirms the *soteriological unity of mankind*, that is, salvation is open to all races and sexes, not the *sociological integration of all races*, that is, the melding of all races into one new race.

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The Gospel did not perform the miracle of eliminating all racial and gender distinctions in the Apostolic Church. Greeks remained Greeks and Jews were still Jews. Males and females were not transformed into unisex beings. The text teaches us that all races have equal opportunity for salvation and to become part of spiritual Israel. But this does not mean that God wants everyone physically melded into one race.

### **Respect for Divinely Established Distinctions**

We live in an age when divinely established functional and sexual distinctions are rejected as an immoral legacy of the Dark Ages. The new social “Gospel” teaches functional and sexual interchangeability. Men can be women and women can be men, both functionally and sexuality. I discuss this philosophy at great length in my book *WOMEN IN THE CHURCH*. This philosophy has given impetus to the ordination of women and of homosexuals. The reasoning is that if functional distinctions do not matter, why should sexual distinctions matter? By extension, the same reasoning is applied to racial distinctions: If we are one in Christ, why should racial distinctions matter?

My impression is that the Bible teaches us to respect all the distinctions that God has established. For example, we read: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does this things is an abomination to the Lord your God” (Deut 22:5).

The distinction extended to the inbreeding of cattle, mixing of seeds, or even cloth-threads. “You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not saw your field with two different kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two different kinds of stuff” (Lev 19:19). The reason for such instructions appears to be the need to respect the order of God’s creation. God does not to approve blurring the distinctions which He has established.

### **The Origin of Racial Distinctions**

The Bible teaches that all races descend from our first parents, Adam and Eve. All the genetic diversity we see today, was built in at the beginning. Prior to the building of the Tower of Babel “the whole earth

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had one language” (Gen 11:1). The rebellion at the Tower of Babel resulted in people being scattered over the earth. Such a scattering produced two effects: one genetic and the other linguistic.

Genetically, the separation of inbreeding populations produced distinct phenotypic characteristics within each separate population. Linguistically, each separate populations developed their own distinctive language. The result was that different races and cultures were formed, with certain features becoming dominant in each group.

Paul alludes to these distinctions when he says that God “made from one [Adam and Eve] every nations men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitations” (Acts 17:26). Obviously the “boundaries” refers not only to the geographical areas, but also to the racial and linguistic characteristics of each people group.

### **Interracial Marriages**

In the Bible there are a few examples of interracial marriage. A notable example is the Cushite (Ethiopian) woman that Moses married (Num 12:1). No clues are given as to when and why Moses married this woman, whose name is not even given. The only thing that we know is that she was not well-accepted by Aaron and Miriam.

Another example is the marriage of Ruth, the Moabite, to Boaz, an Israelites. Prior to her marriage she expressed her faith in the true God (Ruth 1:16). These examples of interracial marriage in the Bible are the exemption, rather than the rule. The rule was to avoid marrying foreigners because of the danger of apostasy. “You shall not marry with them [Cananites], giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons. For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (Deut 7:3-4; Ex 34:10-17).

This instruction was ignored by the Jews, especially when they returned to their homeland after the Babylonian exile. Many of them, including the priests, married native women and had children from them. Ezra, after a night of prayer and supplication, called all the people instructing

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the men “to put them [the wives] away with their children” (Ezra 10:44). Plans were laid out on how to carry out the instruction of sending away all the foreign wives with their children. A long list is given in Ezra 10 of all the priests, Levites, and leading men who obeyed the command by sending away their foreign wives and children.

Frankly, I find this sad story very disconcerting. It does not seem to be a sensible solution to break up families by sending away wives and children, in order to restore racial purity and to bring out the spiritual reformation. After all, it was the men who caused the problem in the first place by marrying foreign women. There are no indications in the story that these women were insubordinate and determine to promote their pagan beliefs. In my view, the men should have been challenged to accept responsibility for their wrong doings and to become the spiritual priest of their homes by leading their wives and children to the true worship of God.

The only way I can make sense of the story is by noting the importance that the Bible attaches to respecting racial and cultural distinctions. The Jews were instructed not to marry foreigners, because people are conditioned not only by culture and education, but also by racial and genetic patterns. This is why God has set some boundaries for the orderly functioning of the human family (Acts 17:26; Gen 10:25,32; Deut 32:8).

Over half a century ago, when the U. S. declared war on Japan, the government rounded up and imprisoned Japanese-Americans just for being Japanese. The government never considered the political leanings of the people. It assumed that people of the same race are genetically predisposed to support the policies of leaders of their own race. This example shows how difficult it is to be rational when racial tensions arise.

No matter which races are combined, there exists an inherent possibility for different ways of thinking to clash. Moreover, children of interracial marriages are confused about who they really are. Racial bigotry can cause tensions within the family. Life is hard enough without adding the burden of interracial tensions.

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An important point to note is that there are no derogatory references in the Bible about black skin color. On the contrary, Solomon quotes his lover as saying “I am black but comely” (Songs of Sol 1:5; KJV). The text suggests that “BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL” in the Bible. There are no indications in the Bible of inferior status assigned to those of black skin. The reason is that God is the Creator of all races. Racial distinction are not the result of sin, but are part of God’s design for the orderly functioning of the human family.

### **Racial Distinctions in the Apostolic Church**

The Apostolic Church understood that accepting people of all races as equal in Christ when it comes to salvation, does not eliminate racial or ethnic distinctions. This principle is exemplified in the division of the Apostolic Church between THE CHURCH OF THE CIRCUMCISION, that is, JUDEO-CHRISTIANS, and THE CHURCH OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION, that is, GENTILE CHRISTIANS.

Paul himself admits that he was commissioned to minister to the Gentiles (the uncircumcised), while Peter to the Jews (the circumcised) (Gal 2:8). The two churches co-existed side by side in mutual respect during the first two centuries. No attempt was made by the apostles to integrate the two churches, because Scripture teaches that God has created us equal, but different. The Apostolic Church understood that differences in gender and race have to be respected.

Gradually a rift developed between the Jewish and Gentile churches, as a result of the Roman repressive anti-Jewish measures, which outlawed the practice of Judaism in general and the Sabbath in particular. I have examined this development in my doctoral dissertation. The outcome was that Gentile Christians came to distance themselves from Jews and Jewish-Christians, especially by abandoning even the Sabbath.

The point is that the Gospel teaches to accept and respect every person, irrespective of color, race, or culture, because *soteriologically*, that is, in terms of salvation, we are one in Christ, that is, equal before God. But the Gospel does not promote forced racial, cultural, or ethnic integration, because *sociologically* it recognizes and respects the racial, cultural, and ethnic distinctions established by God.

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Paul alludes to these distinctions when he says that God “made from one [Adam and Eve] every nations men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitations” (Acts 17:26). Obviously the boundaries, as noted earlier, are not only geographical, but also cultural, linguistic, and racial.

### **The Problem of Accepting Gentile Christians**

The problem in the Apostolic Church is that Jewish-Christians were apprehensive about interacting socially with Gentile Christians. It was through the vision of a great sheet containing clean and unclean animals, that God taught Peter not to be afraid to interact socially with Cornelius, a Gentile, because “what God has cleansed, you must not call common [unclean]” (Acts 10:15).

The issue of the social acceptance of Gentile Christian was deeply felt in the Apostolic Church. In fact, the first Jerusalem Council was convened in 49 A. D. to address this very question. The decision formulated by the Council was to inform the Gentiles who accepted Christ to respect four specific Mosaic laws (abstention from idolatry, unchastity, strangled meat, and blood) found in Leviticus 17-18. The original intent of these laws was to make it possible for foreigners (*geer*) to live among the Israelites.

In other words, the Mosaic law regarding the foreigners living in Israel, was now applied by the Apostolic leaders to the Gentile believers who wanted to live among Jewish believers. The foreigners in the OT and the Gentiles in the NT, were to be accepted and respected, but they were not expected to abandon their ethnic identity by becoming Jews. There are no provisions in the Bible for forced integration, that is, Gentiles becoming Jews or vice versa.

The Apostolic church gradually and painfully understood that the universal salvation offered through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, meant the acceptance and respect of people of different races and culture. Such an acceptance did not result in forced integration. The Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians learned to accept and respect one another, but they continued to co-exist as independent churches. To use today’s language, we might say that in the Apostolic Church there were the JEWISH



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CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE and the GENTILE CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE.

Gradually the Judeo-Christian churches disappeared, largely as a result of the Roman repressive measures against the Jews and their Sabbath. To avoid such measures Gentile Christians distanced themselves from Jews and Jewish Christians in order to show to the Roman authorities their separation from Judaism and their Sabbath, as well as their integration into cycles and worship the pagan society, especially by adopting the Day of the Sun. In my dissertation FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY you will find a lengthy analysis of this process.

### **APPLICATION TO OUR TIMES OF THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH**

When we apply the example of the Apostolic Church to our times, it is evident that forced integration did not work in apostolic times and will not work today. The reasons are theological and practical. *Theologically*, racial and cultural distinctions are part of God’s design for the human family. *Practically*, most people want to retain their cultural and racial identity. For example, the Hispanics in America are the fastest growing ethnic group. They are so committed to preserve their ethnic identity, that they insist in speaking Spanish at home, at school, in the church, and in the society at large.

In some cities like Miami, English has become a second language. Wherever you go, you feel like a foreigner if you do not speak Spanish. I deplore this situation. If people want to remain Hispanic linguistically and culturally, then they should choose to live in their own country. When our family landed in America on July 4, 1974, we were determined to learn English in order to integrate in the American culture as much as we could. The first thing that we did was to stop speaking Italian at home. We did not want our children to become second class citizens by speaking a broken English. Most Hispanic students struggle to get good grades, not because they are less intelligent, but because they cannot express themselves well in English. Their parents do not motivate them to become integrated in the American society.

The same situation exists in our Adventist Church. In some conferences the number of ethnic churches outnumbers the English-speaking

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churches. The reason is that most people prefer to worship and fellowship with members of their own culture and race. At Andrews University numerous ethnic churches have been established, sometimes at great sacrifices. We have Korean, Hispanic, Filipino, Caribbean, Black, African, Asian, and other Adventist churches. Unfortunately, there is no Italian Church. I would love from time to time to worship in an Italian church to hear my melodious Italian language and to interact socially with believers who share my cultural heritage.

It is the same desire to preserve one’s cultural and racial identity that is influencing parent to send their children to a school where their own race is adequately represented. For example, most white parents have no problems yet in sending their children to Andrews University, because black students make up 27% of the student body. They feel that there are still ample opportunities for their children to date and marry members of their own race.

The situation is much different at Atlantic Union College where 83% of the students are blacks. Most white parents do not feel comfortable to send their sons and daughters to a school where the racial mix is predominantly black. Thus, they usually send their children to Southern Adventist University which at this moment has only 11% of black students. The situation is rapidly changing as the influx of blacks at Southern Adventist University has been increasing dramatically in recent years. The explosive enrollment of white students of the past few years, will not last for ever. Soon white parents will have to face the reality that even Southern University will no longer be the “most white” Adventist university in North America.

In the light of the American experience, white South African parents can hardly be blamed for failing to send their sons and daughters to Helderberg college—an almost totally black college. The issue is not racism, but the lack of a balanced racial mix that provides white students opportunities to date and marry within their own race. If Helderberg was racially mixed like Andrews University, I believe that most white parents would have no problems in sending their sons and daughters there.

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**Conclusion**

This preliminary investigation has shown that the unity in Christ proclaimed by the Gospel, does not abolish racial, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic distinctions. The Bible teaches us to accept and respect as members of the family of God, people of all races, languages and culture. Since racial distinctions have been established by God, they are to be accepted and respected, not abolished.

The biblical solution to the racial problem is not forced integration. America has experienced first hand the total failure of forced integration by bussing students away from their own ethnic schools to integrated schools. The result has been that today schools in America are more segregated than ever been before. The solution proposed by the Bible is to accept and respect people of all races, without forcing the elimination of racial or cultural distinctions, which God has established for the orderly functioning of the human family.

People have the right to live, worship, study, and marry within their own racial and cultural heritage. Some may feel comfortable to study, worship, or even marry within a different culture. That is their own prerogative. But there are no indication in the Bible that the aim of the Gospel is to eliminate all racial or cultural distinctions.

The great multitude of the redeemed consists of an amazing racial mixture of people from “every nation, from all tribes and people and tongues” (Rev 7:9; 14:6). It is evident that racial distinctions are here to stay until Christ’s coming. What will happen at that time we do not know. I have reason to believe that we will all speak ITALIAN, because after all Italian is the most musical language. Consequently ITALIAN will help to preserve musical atmosphere of the new earth! (Please laugh!).

While we live in this present world, let us accept and respect the racial distinctions that God has established for the orderly functioning of the human family. Let us resolve to uphold at all costs the dignity of all people as beings created in the image of God. It would be inconsistent for our Adventist Church to be involved in world mission, without accepting people of all races as sons and daughters of God, created in His image and redeemed by Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

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**A COMMENT ABOUT JON PAULIEN’S ESSAY**

The essay you are about to read, is written by Jon Paulien, Ph. D., Professor of New Testament and Chairman of the New Testament Department. Paulien is highly respected as a brilliant Adventist scholar and in the view of many, he is our foremost Adventist authority on Daniel and Revelation. I would urge you to read the books related to this essay, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* and *The Deep Things of God*. Both books can be ordered by calling the ABC toll free number: (800) 435 0008).

In a clear and compelling way, Paulien shows that the attempt to identify the seven headed beast of Revelation 17 with the last seven popes, cannot be supported by the text or context. By examining the broader context and John’s worldview, Paulien concludes that the seven heads represent the great nations/empires that have functioned as enemies of God’s people. The last head being “a worldwide political confederacy [that] functions in support of a worldwide religious unity (dragon, beast and false prophet— Rev 16:13-19) for a period of time (Rev 17:1-3).” Take time to read and reread this essay. It will open your mind to a responsible interpretation of Endtime prophecies.

**“Revelation 17 and the Papacy”****Jon Paulien, Ph. D.****Professor of New Testament,****Chairman of the NT Department, Andrews University****Author of numerous books**

The recent death of Pope John Paul II and the election of his successor have triggered a great deal of interest among Adventists in the seven-headed beast of Revelation 17. While I have not seen any new essays on the topic,<sup>1</sup> a flurry of emails from pastors, friends and former students indicates considerable “buzz” about the possible implications of the chapter for current events. I would like to take this opportunity to offer some thoughts on the chapter that may be helpful for the ongoing discussion.

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The focus of greatest interest is verse 10, which describes the seven heads of the beast as consecutive. “Five have fallen, one is now, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain for a short time (my translation).” Adventist lay interpreters have, for several decades, sought to connect these heads with the series of popes who have been in place since the Vatican was re-established as a secular nation in 1929. Most studies through the years saw John Paul II as the last or next to last in the sequence. Thus his death, and the age of his successor, has rekindled speculation regarding the nearness of the End, especially since Benedict XVI is, in fact, the seventh pope since 1929.

### **A Most Problematic Passage**

It should be pointed out, for starters, that Rev 17:7-11 is one of the most vexing and difficult passages to interpret in all of the Bible. I once did a doctoral seminar with five students who each did research papers into the Greek of the passage. After three months the students felt that their careful research had produced more questions than answers. This is not a text, therefore, that will offer clarity in response to superficial effort. The less one knows about Revelation 17, the easier it is to find a particular interpretation convincing.

As background to this essay, readers may wish to consult two books I have previously published. In *The Deep Things of God* I lay out a general method of interpretation for Revelation. Anyone who follows the method carefully will discover many things about the text of Revelation that would otherwise be overlooked. This can only enhance understanding. In *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* I have laid out a general interpretation of Revelation 17 in the context of the final crisis of earth’s history. Both books are available in Adventist Book Centers and online at entities such as Amazon.com. (To order your copies, simply call the ABC toll free number (800) 435 0008). In this essay, I will explore more deeply the part of the text that concerns the seven heads.

### **The Position of Mainstream Scholarship**

In the wider world of mainstream scholarship, research on Revelation 17 is limited largely to a preterist approach, which sees the book of Revelation as a symbolic reflection on the situation of John’s day. Ac-

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According to this view, the seven churches of Revelation faced threats from both inside and outside the church. The Nicolaitans and the followers of “Jezebel” (presumed to be a church leader at variance with John) challenge the churches’ position on sexuality and the eating of food offered to idols from the inside. The Jews and the Roman authorities challenge the churches from outside. The symbolism of John’s vision, therefore, addressed how the church should respond to these threats in the first-century context, particularly the threat from the Roman authorities.

When it comes to Revelation 17, the preterist position notes that the “seven mountains” of 17:9 could also be translated “seven hills.” (The biblical “Mount” of Olives, for example, is a mere hill, several hundred feet above the site of ancient Jerusalem) A compelling analogy in the ancient world was the seven hills upon which the city of Rome stood. Several first-century writers referred to Rome as the “city of seven hills.”<sup>2</sup>

The bulk of preterist scholars, therefore, see in the seven heads references to seven specific emperors of the first century. But this perspective is flawed in the sense that there is no consensus regarding the specific emperors intended.<sup>3</sup> David Aune, author of the most detailed commentary on Revelation ever written<sup>4</sup> summarizes no less than nine contradictory lists of emperors that can be found in the scholarly literature.<sup>5</sup> So even if the preterist interpretation were John’s intention, it is not at all clear what John was intending here. And recent discoveries raise doubts that there was extensive persecution against Christians during the time of Domitian.<sup>6</sup> So the Roman emperor hypothesis is shaky at best.<sup>7</sup>

A number of preterist scholars like Aune, therefore, see the seven heads of Revelation 17 in more symbolic terms, although consensus on exactly what to make of them as symbols is lacking as well.<sup>8</sup> So for mainstream scholarship, Rev 17:10 remains an unclear text, one of the most vexing in all of the Bible. This fact should caution anyone who seeks to find meaning for today in a superficial reading of the passage.<sup>9</sup>

### **Major Adventist Interpretations**

Turning to Adventist interpretation of the passage, Ellen White, the most authoritative Adventist interpreter, does not seem to address the issue of Rev 17:10 at all, in any of her voluminous biblical interpreta-

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tions. In fact, she has extremely little to say even about Revelation 17 as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Uriah Smith also had relatively little to say about the seven heads of Rev 17:7-11. He does seem to believe that the “one is now” head of Rev 17:10 is the Rome of John’s day.<sup>11</sup> He makes no attempt to interpret the “five have fallen.”

In his revision and update of Smith’s work, Mervyn Maxwell seems to move away from Smith’s position<sup>12</sup> that the “one is now” head must be understood as reigning in John’s day (although he is not perfectly clear on this). Instead he suggests the “one is now” could be the time of the wounded head of Rev 13:3, which he understands as “Christian Rome in its wounded state.” In this scheme the seven heads are Babylon, Persia, Greece, pagan Rome, Christian Rome, Christian Rome (wounded) and Christian Rome (revived).<sup>13</sup> Maxwell’s position has been endorsed in some detail by Jacques Doukhan.<sup>14</sup>

Kenneth Strand, in an article submitted to the Daniel and Revelation Committee of the General Conference, agreed with Smith that the standpoint of the “one now is” is John’s Day.<sup>15</sup> But like Smith, he asserted that view, he did not make a case for it. He also argued that the “hills” of Rev 17:9 should be translated as “mountains”<sup>16</sup> and that mountains in Bible prophecy never represent individuals, they always represent kingdoms or empires. He goes on to list the five “that have fallen” as Egypt, Assyria, Babyon, Persia and Greece, and the “one now is” is the Rome of John’s day.<sup>17</sup> One can infer from Strand’s comments elsewhere that he understood the seventh head to be papal Rome in the Middle Ages.<sup>18</sup> His presentation, unfortunately (for our purposes), was more of an attack on preterism than an outline of what Adventists could or should make of the text.

Ranko Stefanovic, in his recent commentary, seems to take up the view of Strand, but without detailed argument.<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, I would note that neither the scholars nor the administrators of the church have put major effort into the interpretation of Rev 17:7-11. This may reflect Ellen White’s seeming disinterest, the difficulty

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of the passage, and the sense that it is not crucial to Adventist faith and identity. Given the current interest in the passage, however, it seems that a more careful analysis of the text from an Adventist perspective is called for.

### **The Exegetical Process**

Since I have been involved in most of the church’s major efforts to understand Revelation over the last twenty years, Dr. Bacchiocchi asked me to provide an analysis of Rev 17:10 for the benefit of his email readers. What follows is not an exhaustive study of the possibilities in the text or in the secondary literature about the text. But I trust that it will be a helpful starting point and guide for future work. All who wish to contribute to the church’s understanding of this text will want to consider the methodology offered in my book, *The Deep Things of God*, pages 93-176. If anyone is aware of a more thorough method for approaching the text of Revelation, I would welcome learning about it. The following is based on understanding grounded in that method.

A brief note on the role of scholarly exegesis in the church’s exploration of the Bible is warranted. Many people feel that if only all the evidence available in the Greek and other sources could be examined, every Bible text would become clear. Other people see the variety of exegetical viewpoints on many texts as evidence that the whole process of scholarship is a waste of time. Both extreme positions fall short of reality. The process of exegesis will sometimes clarify things that were poorly understood. But at other times it will muddy waters that we thought were clear.

In simple terms, exegesis helps us discern which texts of the Bible are clear and which are unclear. “In a multitude of counselors there is safety.” When exegetes from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives all agree on a text, we can safely conclude that the text is reasonably clear. When the same exegetes find little to agree about in a text, it is usually a “problem text” or a “difficult passage.” My playful description of an unclear text is one “where it is much easier to see the flaws in someone else’s interpretation than to build a convincing interpretation of your own.” Rev 17:10 is one of those unclear texts.



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Texts can be unclear for a lot of reasons. We may not be familiar with the exact meaning of certain words in the text. The grammar and syntax of the Greek may allow more than one interpretation of a construction. We may not know the audience to which a work is addressed. We may not know a viewpoint that a biblical author is contradicting. We may not know the setting or the time in which a revelation was presented. We may not know that an author is alluding to some earlier literary text. An author may be alluding to an oral tradition that we do not have access to. God meets people where they are. And when we are not where the original readers were, the chances of misunderstanding can be great.

But God is in control of His revelations. The Spirit is available to help us understand what is of ongoing validity and importance. There are tools of exegesis that open our eyes to evidence and unlock possibilities that we may have missed in the past. It is my hope, however, that careful exegesis can shed some light on Rev 17:7-11, bringing at least pockets of clarity to what has been so unclear in the past. At the least it can help us see what is clear and what is not clear and why. This can help serious students of the text avoid overstating the case for a particular interpretation of the text.

### **A Brief Analysis of the Context**

Revelation 17 builds on the earlier vision of the seven bowl/plagues in Revelation 15-16. In Revelation 17:1 we read (my translation), “And one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits upon many waters.’” So Revelation 17 should be understood as a further analysis of some aspect of the bowl plagues. Since the woman of 17:1 is named Babylon (Rev 17:5), and the “many waters” of Babylon are the Euphrates River (Jer 51:7, 13), Revelation 17 is particularly an exegesis of Rev 16:12-16 (which includes reference to Armageddon), the sixth bowl/plague. Revelation 17 concerns the final battle of earth’s history (Rev 17:12-17).

After John’s initial encounter with the bowl angel (Rev 17:1-2), he goes into vision “in the spirit” (Rev 17:3). He sees a woman (presumably the prostitute of verses 1-2) sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads and

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ten horns (Rev 17:3). The woman is dressed in spectacular, royal fashion (Rev 17:4), reminiscent of the city Babylon (Rev 18:16) and, perhaps, of Israel’s High Priest (Exod 28:1-43).<sup>20</sup> Upon her forehead is a miter, naming her “Babylon the Great, Mother of Prostitutes” (Rev 17:5). John sees that the woman is drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus (Rev 17:6a). John is amazed by what he has seen (Rev 17:6b). The rest of the chapter is an angelic explanation of the vision of verses 3-6. So chapter 17 could be structured as follows:

1-2: Angelic Introduction to the Vision

3-6: Vision of the Woman Riding the Beast and John’s Reaction

7-11: Angelic Explanation of the Beast and Its Seven Heads

12-14 Angelic Explanation of the Ten Horns and the Lamb’s

War

15-18 Angelic Explanation of the Woman’s Destruction

The crucial distinction here is between the vision (Rev 17:3-6), where John sees images without explanation, and angelic explanation, where various details of the vision are explained and sometimes expanded on (Rev 17:1-2, 7-18). This distinction will prove helpful at a later stage of this study.

Revelation 18 is, in some ways, a mirror image of Revelation 17, they are two sides of the same coin. In Revelation 17 Babylon is portrayed in terms of a prostitute, in Revelation 18 she is portrayed in terms of the Great City. Rev 17:18 links the two images into one: “And the woman, which you saw, is the Great City which has dominion (Greek: “kingship:”) over the kings of the earth.” Since Revelation 18 clearly portrays some of the final events of earth’s history, Revelation 17 is a description of end-time realities as well.

A second aspect of the context is that both woman and beast have interesting antecedents in chapters 12-13. The seven-headed, ten-horned beast is preceded by the dragon in Revelation 12 and the beast from the sea in Revelation 13. The seven heads in Revelation 17 are clearly consecutive (Rev 17:10). In Revelation 12, on the other hand, there is no indication whether the heads of the dragon function all at once or in sequence. In Revelation 13, however, it says about the beast from the sea that “one

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of his heads was, as it were, wounded to death.” Rev 13:3. This suggests that the heads of Revelation 13 should also be seen as consecutive.

If this is so, the dragon of chapter 12, the sea beast of chapter 13, and the scarlet beast of chapter 17 manifest three different stages of one and the same beast. The dragon of chapter 12 is best associated with the actions of the Empire (in the person of Herod the Great) against the Christ child (Rev 12:5).<sup>21</sup> The activities of the sea beast are later.<sup>22</sup> Evidently the sea beast operates under two separate heads, the first is wounded to death, but then the sea beast returns with a new head at a later time (Rev 13:3, 12). Adventists have been fairly unanimous in seeing the actions of the sea beast before its wounding as a forecast of the actions of the medieval papacy.

The scarlet beast of Revelation 17 clearly functions in the context of the seven last plagues, so it is the final manifestation of the beast, presumably under the “eighth” head. It is the very last manifestation before the beast joins the false prophet in the lake of fire (Rev 19:17-21). The seven heads of the beast in Rev 17:7-11 would, therefore, seem to include the actions of the dragon and the sea beast. These actions are manifestations of the beast under earlier heads.

The woman of Revelation 17 recalls the faithful woman of Revelation 12. John’s last view of the faithful woman was in the desert. There she was rescued by the earth from the flood of water that was spewed out of the dragon’s mouth (Rev 12:15-16). When he again sees a woman out in the desert, it is the harlot Babylon! No wonder John is astonished (John 17:6)! Clearly the Babylon of Revelation 17 has a Christian face. She represents the end-time religious counterfeit of God’s faithful remnant, the seed of the woman (Rev 12:17).

An additional context of the three beasts is the background in Daniel 7. When you look carefully at that vision, you realize that the four beasts of Daniel 7 total seven heads and ten horns! The connection with Daniel 7 is clearest in the beast from the sea (Rev 13:1-10). It has characteristics of the lion, the bear, the leopard and the fourth beast (cf. Rev 13:1-2). It, like the beasts of Daniel 7, comes out of the sea (Rev 13:1, Dan 7:2). All three beasts are designed to recall the vision of Daniel 7. The prophecy

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of Revelation 17 is modeled, therefore, on the beasts of Daniel 7. The various heads there symbolize more than individual kings or religious leaders, they represent whole nations or empires that rule for extended periods. Thus the seven heads of Revelation 17 probably symbolize whole nations or empires rather than individuals.

### **Revelation 17:7-11**

The passage begins innocently enough. The angel tells John that he will explain the mystery of the woman and the seven-headed, ten-horned beast that he had seen in the vision (Rev 17:7). Things quickly get confusing after that. In verse 8 the beast “was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the Abyss and go to (his) destruction.” Then the angel describes the amazement of the wicked (“those who live on the earth”) when they see the beast who “was, and is not, and will become present” (17:8).

In verse 9 the mind that has wisdom learns that the seven heads are actually seven mountains, “upon which the woman sits, and they are seven kings.” So the woman is not only sitting on a beast, but on seven mountains (which are the same as the seven heads). And these seven mountains are also seven “kings” (likely “kingdoms” as in Dan 2:36-45, the last kingdom being represented by a mountain).

In verse ten John is told that five of these heads/mountains/kings “have fallen, one is now, and the other has not yet come, but when he comes he must remain for a short time.” The crucial question of this verse is when the “now is” time is to be understood. Is it the time of John, as Strand and Stefanovic have suggested? Is it the time of the vision, when the woman sits on the beast? Is it the time of the deadly wound in Rev 13:3, as Maxwell suggests? Some who have seen in these seven heads seven recent popes have suggested that the “deadly wound” was actually the wounding of John Paul II in St. Peter’s Square more than twenty years ago. But John Paul did not die on that occasion and the force of the Greek in Rev 13:3 is “wound of his death.” John Paul’s death was not connected to the wound he suffered 24 years earlier.

In verse 11 things get even more complicated. “And the beast who was and is not, the same is an eighth (head) and is one of the seven, and

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he will go to (his) destruction.” The word “head” is not mentioned, leaving ambiguous whether beast or head or both are intended by “eighth.” The fact that “eighth” is used connects this verse with the seven heads of 17:9-10. But it is the “beast” that is the “eighth” and the “eighth” is described in the same language as the beast itself in verse 8, “he will go to (his) destruction.” So is the eighth head the same thing as the beast? What about the other heads then? Are they “the beast” or are they separate from the beast?

Are you beginning to see why my doctoral students felt more confused after the class than before? The more carefully you look at the passage, the more things you find that are hard to reconcile with a coherent reading of the passage. The best explanation of verse 11 would seem to be that the beast exists itself in seven (or eight) consecutive phases, each of which has its own head. When John sees the beast in the vision (Rev 17:3), it is in its eighth phase. But the seven heads he sees are echoes of the seven earlier phases. So while the beast appears with seven heads in the vision, the image of a seven-headed beast represents a beast that lives, dies and is resurrected seven or eight times.<sup>24</sup> Is your head spinning yet? Me too.

### **What We Know for Sure So Far**

A few things are clear so far. 1) Revelation 17 is sandwiched between two end-time passages, the bowl/plagues of Revelation 16 and the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18. So the primary focus of the vision is on the end-time battle of Armageddon and the fall of Babylon. 2) The seven heads of the beast are consecutive or sequential, they are not all on the beast at the same time. 3) The detailed description of the seven heads is part of an angelic explanation (Rev 17:7-18), it is not part of the vision proper (Rev 17:3-6).

In *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*, 131-150 I show how the woman who sits on the beast represents worldwide religious authority in opposition to the end-time remnant. The beast itself represents the civil and secular powers of the world united in opposition to God’s people and in support of prostitute Babylon. To save space I will not repeat the biblical evidence for these conclusions, that can be explored in the above book. The beast itself is not, therefore, to be confused with the end-time

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papacy, the head of worldwide religious authority. The beast represents the civil powers of the world who end up turning on Babylon and destroying her (Rev 17:16). So a fourth thing is reasonably certain. 4) The beast of Revelation 17 represents political and military power more than religious authority.

### **The Time of the “Now Is”**

A major unresolved question is exactly when these seven heads function. Are they all at the end of time? Or were at least five of them already in the past when John wrote his book? Or is the time of the head that “now is” somewhere in between, as Maxwell has suggested? Are there some patterns in Bible prophecy that can guide us to a solid answer to these questions? I believe there are two basic principles that need to be kept in mind.

#### **1) God Meets People Where They Are**

A generally accepted principle of biblical interpretation is that God meets people where they are. In other words, Scripture was given in the time, place, language, and culture of specific human beings.<sup>25</sup> The knowledge, experience, and background of the Biblical writers was respected. Paul, with his “Ph.D.,” expresses God’s revelation to him in a different way than does Peter, the fisherman. John writes in simple, clear, almost childlike Greek. On the other hand, the author of Hebrews has the most complex and literary Greek in all the New Testament with the exception of the first four verses of Luke. In Matthew, you have someone who understands the Jewish mind. Mark, on the other hand, reaches out to the Gentile mind. So the revelations recorded in the Bible were given in a way comprehensible to each audience.

This principle is clearly articulated in *Selected Messages*, Volume 1, 19-22:

The writers of the Bible had to express their ideas in human language. It was written by human men. These men were inspired of the Holy Spirit. . . .

The Scriptures were given to men, not in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but piece by piece through successive generations,

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as God in His providence saw a **fitting opportunity** to impress man at sundry times and divers places. . . . The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought.<sup>28</sup>

While this principle is true for the Bible in general, does it apply to the sweeping historical sequences of apocalyptic? Did God consider the language, time and place of Daniel and John when He provided the visions they record in their books? Indeed He did. Biblical apocalyptic also met God’s people where they were. The book of Revelation is firmly grounded in the experience of seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev 1:11,19; 22:16). It was intended to make sense to the one who reads and those who hear (Rev 1:3).<sup>29</sup> The vision of Christ utilized the language of John’s past, the Old Testament, as the primary source for its symbolism.

God meets people where they are in Daniel as well. While Adventists tend to distinguish between Nebuchadnezzar’s “dream” and Daniel’s “vision,”<sup>30</sup> that distinction is not made by the biblical text. The experience of the two “prophets” was the same.<sup>31</sup> In Dan 2:28 Nebuchadnezzar is told, “Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these.” In Dan 7:1 we are told, “Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed (NIV).” The Aramaic of Dan 7:1 is essentially identical with that of Dan 2:28.<sup>32</sup> In both cases God chose to reveal Himself in visionary form, He was in full control of the revelation.<sup>33</sup>

To Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 God portrays the future world empires by means of an idol.<sup>34</sup> This makes sense in that time and place because, to the heathen king, the nations of the world were bright and shining counterparts of the gods they worshiped. For Daniel the Hebrew prophet, on the other hand, the nations of the world were like vicious, ravenous beasts who were hurting his people. So in the vision of Daniel 7 God again draws on the prophet’s knowledge and setting. This time, instead of symbolism drawn from the Babylonian world, He shapes the vision in terms of the creation story of Genesis chapters 1 and 2.<sup>35</sup> God describes Daniel’s future in terms of a new creation. The sequence of history in both visions is roughly the same (Dan 2:45; 7:17). The primary message of both visions is the same, God is in control of history (Dan

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2:37-38; 7:26-27). But in his choice of imagery, God meets apocalyptic writers where they are! There are a couple of conclusions I would like to draw from the above summary.

1) God speaks to the prophets in the context of their own time, place, and circumstances. He speaks in language they can understand and appreciate, even when He speaks in apocalyptic terms. He uses the language of the prophet’s past to paint a picture of the prophet’s future. God meets people where they are. In our study of Bible prophecies like Revelation 17, therefore, it is imperative that we seek to understand them in terms of the original time, place, language, and circumstances, as well as the content of the whole of Scripture. God’s meaning for today will not contradict the message that He placed in the vision in the first place.

This is not to be confused with the preterist position. The preterist position argues that Daniel and Revelation offer no insight into the far future of their prophets. Apocalyptic books speak instead to the immediate situation, and that situation only. An Adventist approach, on the other hand, believes that God places in the apocalyptic visions accurate information about the far future, but that future is described in the language of the prophet’s time and place. If we want to understand what God was telling John about the future, we need to first understand what John understood.

2) The purpose of apocalyptic visions is not simply to satisfy human curiosity about the future (although that may have played a role in the first instance, according to Dan 2:29). It is a message about the character and the workings of God. God is not only communicating something about the future course of history, He is revealing Himself as the One who is in control of that history. To study apocalyptic only as a key to unlock details of the future is to miss its message about a God who seeks to be known by His people. From a Christian perspective, apocalyptic is never rightly understood unless its central focus is on the “son of man,” Jesus Christ.

## **2) The Difference Between Vision and Interpretation**

In light of the previous section, however, distinction must be made



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between the time of apocalyptic visions and the time of their interpretation. In a vision, the prophet can travel anywhere in the universe and to any point of time, all the way to the end of the world. The events of the vision are not necessarily located in the prophet’s time and place. But when the vision is explained to the prophet afterward, the explanation always comes in the time, place and circumstances of the visionary.

We can clearly see this principle in Daniel 2. While the vision of the statue carries Nebuchadnezzar to end of earth’s history, the explanation of the vision by Daniel is firmly grounded in the time and place of Nebuchadnezzar. The interpretation begins with a straightforward, unambiguous assertion, “You are that head of gold (Dan 2:38).” Nebuchadnezzar is then told that the series of kingdoms that follow are “after you” (2:39) in point of time.

As was the case with Daniel 2, the apocalyptic prophecy of Dan 7 is divided into two parts; a description of the vision, in which the prophet is transported through time and space (Dan 7:2-14), and an explanation of the vision, given in the language, time and place of the prophet (Dan 7:15-27). Even though Daniel experienced all elements of the vision, including the final events, the explanation clarifies that the vision is essentially about the future experience of Daniel’s people (Dan 7:17-18, 23-27) The explanation comes for the benefit of Daniel and, therefore, explains things in terms of his location in the world and history, in terms he can understand. The same pattern can be seen in Daniel 8 and Zech 4:1-14.<sup>38</sup>

So whenever vision moves to interpretation, the principle of “God meets people where they are” must be applied to the explanations given. Prophets don’t usually seem to understand the revelation from visions alone.<sup>39</sup> An explanation is necessary for the revelation to be understood.<sup>40</sup> Since that explanation is given for the benefit of the prophet, it is based on the time, place and circumstances in which the seer lives. Present, past and future are not grounded in visionary time, but in terms of the prophet’s physical location and time frame. This principle has profound implications for the interpretation of difficult apocalyptic texts like Rev 17:7-11.

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**Implications For the Seven Popes View**

Popular views that tie the heads of Revelation 17 to specific recent popes run counter to a number of aspects of the text. First the seven heads are seen to begin with Pope Pius XI in 1929. Why this should be so cannot be established from the text of Revelation. Normally, as we have seen, prophetic explanations are given in the time and place of the prophet (I am not aware of a clear exception to this rule). That would make the sixth head the time of John, AD 95. If that is the case, seeing the seven heads as entirely end-time characters is not an option.

A further problem for this view is that the seven heads are based on Daniel 7, where the heads do not represent individual kings or religious leaders, they represent major nations and/or empires.<sup>41</sup> This is further underlined by the equation of the heads and the kings with seven mountains. “Mountains” in Bible prophecy (such as in Daniel 2 and Jeremiah 51) represent major kingdoms as well. So an interpretation that makes the seven heads represent seven individual popes stretches the imagery to unrecognizable proportions.

Furthermore, there is evidence within the book of Revelation itself that the three beasts of Revelation can be equated with the sixth head (Rev 12– pagan Rome of John’s day), the seventh head (Rev 13– the papal Rome that succeeded pagan Rome), and the eighth head (Rev 17 itself– the final worldwide political unity).<sup>42</sup> While not at the compelling level of “clear texts” in my mind, these connections move the weight of evidence strongly against seeing all seven heads as end-time individuals.

A further peril in viewpoints such as this is that they incline those who hold them to a species of date setting. It may be soft date setting (in the lifetime of this pope, or the next), yet it places the focus, not on the spiritual message of the biblical revelation, but on the speculative issue of when Jesus will return (or other end-time events will occur). I have written at length on the dangers of date setting of all kinds in *The Millennium Bug*, also available from ABCs and the internet. The desire to know the “times and the seasons” (Acts 1:6-7) is natural for human beings, but it drives us to erroneous interpretations of Scripture. It is best avoided.

Seventh-day Adventists have long believed that the papacy will play a major role in the final events of earth’s history, and there is nothing in Revelation 17 that would contradict such a view. But there is no significant evidence in the chapter that the sequence of popes at the end of time is the focus of the passage. At best the view is the sum total of a series of questionable assumptions. It cannot, therefore, offer compelling guidance to the larger body of the church. It will be convincing only to those who need it to be so.

**Implications for the Maxwell/Doukhan View**

The view outlined by Maxwell and detailed by Doukhan comes closer to the evidence of Revelation 17 in its larger context. Since Doukhan argues this position in most detail, I will outline his argument briefly.<sup>43</sup> Doukhan would agree with me that the seven heads of Revelation 17 are based on Revelation 13 and Daniel 7 and need to be seen as major empires or nations.<sup>44</sup>

For Doukhan, the Daniel 7 connection becomes determinative of the beginning of the seven heads. The beast from the sea (Revelation 13) incorporates all five major entities of Daniel 7: the lion of Babylon, the bear of Persia, the leopard of Greece, the indescribable beast of Rome and the little horn that follows the fourth beast. For him this articulates the five that “have fallen.” Since the list is based on Daniel 7, it must begin with the first beast of Daniel 7, which is the lion of Babylon.<sup>45</sup>

Doukhan argues in impressive fashion that the three sequences of four parts each in Rev 17:8-11 are parallel to each other.<sup>46</sup> These four-part sequences should be seen as four phases of the beast as it approaches its final destruction in Revelation, chapters 17-19:

**Rev 17:8**

once was  
now is not  
comes up out of the Abyss  
goes to destruction

**Rev 17:10**

five have fallen  
one is  
other has not yet come  
remains a little while

**Rev 17:11**

once was  
now is not  
eighth king  
goes to destruction

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That these three sequences are completely parallel is the key to Doukhan’s argument, but does not strike me as self-evident. For one thing, the first sequence seems to relate to the beast in its end-time phase. The second sequence relates specifically to the heads (which in Doukhan’s scheme beginning in the time of Daniel). The last, as we have seen, seems to blend language related to the beast in verse 8 with language related to the head sequence in verse 10. Its primary focus seems to be on the final phase of the beast.

Doukhan argues that the time of the sixth head is the time of papal wounding, from 1798 to 1929. The seventh and eighth heads are one and the same, reflecting the resurgent papacy after 1929. Doukhan’s argument is impressive and worth careful consideration. It’s major tension with the biblical evidence, however, is in its assumption that the John would be given an explanation rooted in a time frame so far into his future. The sixth head that “now is,” is best understood in terms of John’s time and place, in light of its location in the angelic explanation portion of the chapter rather than the vision proper. The evidence Doukhan draws from Revelation 13 and Daniel 7 is important, but it is not enough to argue that the basic biblical pattern of vision and explanation should be overturned.

### **What Do I Think?**

Obviously, what I think is ultimately not the issue, but I owe it to you, in light of years of wrestling with these texts, to at least give the position that makes the most sense to me at this point. The cornerstone to my position is the basic conviction that in revelation God meets people where they are. When God explains Himself to a prophet (whether directly or through an angel) His intention is to make things as clear as that person can handle at that time. God’s explanations have extended meanings beyond what the original prophet could understand, but those extended meanings will never contradict the original revelation. They will be natural extensions of what the prophet received and understood (see *Deep Things of God*, pages 33-78 for much more on this principle).

This means that the natural way to understand the “five have fallen, one is now and one is yet to come” are in terms of John’s time and place. The seven heads represent a series of empires or major national move-

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ments in the course of human history. If the “one is now” is the Roman Empire of John’s day (clearly portrayed in Revelation 12), what are the five empires that have fallen? I agree with Strand and Stefanovic that they would be the five great nations/empires that functioned as super power enemies of God’s people throughout the Old Testament. These would be Egypt, which held the people of God in captivity for hundreds of years; Assyria, which subjugated Judah and destroyed Israel; plus the three powers mentioned in Daniel 2, 7 and 8; Babylon, Persia and Greece.

The seventh empire, future from John’s day, would be the beast from the sea (Revelation 13), the great papal power that dominated the world spiritually and politically for more than a thousand years. I understand the “eighth head” to be the beast of Revelation 17 itself, a worldwide political and military unity that is yet to occur. In the final days of earth’s history, a worldwide political confederacy functions in support of a worldwide religious unity (dragon, beast and false prophet– Rev 16:13-19) for a period of time (Rev 17:1-3). These two great powers seek to destroy God’s faithful remnant (Rev 12:17; 14:1; 16:15; 17:14), but they are turned aside by God’s intervention (Rev 17:17). In fury at being deceived by end-time Babylon (Rev 13:13-14; 16:13-14) the worldwide political unity turns on her and destroys her (Rev 17:16). This political unity is the eighth head, the final manifestation of the beast. It goes to its destruction (Rev 17:8, 11) in the final conflict at the second coming of Jesus itself (Rev 19:11-21).

A feature of the text I still wrestle with is the intriguing phrase, “the same is an eighth (head) and is one of the seven” (Rev 17:11). The eighth and last phase of the beast’s manifestations is, in a sense, the rebirth or reincarnation of one of the seven earlier ones. Which of the seven? Babylon? That would be supported by the name of the prostitute, but it is not the name of the beast? The Roman Empire? That would be supported by the connections with the beast of Revelation 12. Papal Rome? That would be supported by the connections with Revelation 13, and the concept of the “image of the beast” that would play a major role at the end of time (Rev 13:15). If one goes this way, I prefer the latter viewpoint, but Beale may be correct when he says that “one of the seven” simply means that the eighth is of the same character as the seven.<sup>47</sup> Like those that precede the eighth phase of the beast is evil, rules on the earth and is part of a succession of historical events.

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**Conclusion**

Does my view explain every detail of the text? Obviously not. In spite of our best efforts Revelation 17 remains, and may always be, something of a problem text. While the above is how I make sense of this text, I am open to the possibility that I have missed some things that might prove my position inadequate in one way or the other. But those who wish to counter my view must not think that such a counter can come from a superficial reading of the text. There is much information that I have not been able to share here, but in spite of all my studies I remain in awe of the complexity of this text.

To me the safest conclusion we can make is to avoid basing a major spiritual or theological insight on the twists and turns of this fascinating vision. While none of the above views may ultimately prove correct, the evidential base for a “seven popes” view is too problematic to be taken as fact. At best it is the hopeful suggestion of some who long for Jesus to come soon. I share with them in that longing, and I respect the anticipation that drives them and also their desire to trigger revival and reform in the church. We must not forget, however, that when Jesus does in fact come, most of us will still be surprised at His timing (1 Thess 5:1-3), no matter how hard we have tried to sniff it out in advance. According to both Matthew and Ellen White, the day and the hour will only be revealed when the approaching cloud is already visible to our sight!<sup>48</sup>

Satan will use any means he can to distract us from our double mission of character development and gospel outreach. The great spiritual messages of Adventist faith are compelling in their own right. The clear, compelling message of Scripture is the everlasting gospel in the end-time context of God’s final judgment (Rev 14:6-7). That message does not need an artificial boost from speculative exegesis of difficult passages.

**Spiritual Lesson**

It is intuitive to assume that if God took the trouble to reveal Himself in Scripture, every detail should be understandable, given enough research and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But reality does not seem to support that intuition. Significant portions of Scripture have resisted all attempts

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at a full understanding and Revelation 17 does not seem to be an exception. While there are aspects of the chapter that seem reasonably clear (I outlined that clarity in *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*), there is much that defies our best efforts. Why would God put things in the Bible that we cannot grasp, in spite of diligent effort?

I remember a time when I was on the radio with Mervyn Maxwell, a Seminary colleague and fellow student of Revelation. The subject of discussion was the seven trumpets. As I spoke about the difficulty of finding one’s way through the trumpets, he turned to me and said, “Why would God put things in the Bible that we can’t understand?” I was floored for an instant (being on the radio can do that to you), not knowing what to say. Then an idea came into my mind that seemed compelling at the time (it satisfied Maxwell and me at least) and still makes sense to me today.

I responded, “To keep us coming back to the Bible. Reading the Bible is as essential to us spiritually as food is essential to our bodies. We must ‘eat’ the Word every day to survive spiritually. But if we could come to the place where we had figured out all there was to know about the Bible, we wouldn’t feel we needed to study it any more. We would ‘lose a taste for it.’ God has placed many difficult things in the Bible, so we would be motivated to keep coming back, keep learning, keep growing in our understanding. It is curiosity about what we don’t know that motivates us to keep feeding ourselves and growing in the Lord.

I close with the five key steps in a lifelong relationship with the Bible (see *The Deep Things of God*, 79-92 for the details):

- 1) Approach the Bible with much prayer for the Spirit’s guidance and a distrust in your own understanding up to that point.
- 2) Use the original languages or a variety of translations in your native language.
- 3) Spend the majority of your time in the clear texts of the Bible.
- 4) Spend the majority of your time reading the Bible, rather searching with a concordance or a computer program.

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5) Listen much to the criticism of your peers.

For Adventists, a sixth principle is to apply the five principles also to the writings of Ellen White. As is the case with the Bible, many have missed her central messages by speculative studies drawn from selected statements.

May the Word of God shape your life until Jesus returns.

**ENDNOTES:**

1 Perhaps a dozen have passed through my hands over the last 35 years.

2 David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52c (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 944-945.

3 See the analysis of this position by Kenneth A. Strand, “The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?” in *Symposium on Revelation*— Book II, edited by Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 178-206.

4 David E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52, David A. Barker and Glenn W. Hubbard, editors (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, and Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997-1998).

5 Aune, 946-948.

6 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 69-76; Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 174-185.

7 Note also Strand’s observation (“Seven Hills,” page 186 and note 18) that elsewhere in Rev the word for “hill” in Rev 17:9 is translated “mountain” and nowhere else in Scripture is this word applied to an individual. In addition, Strand note (page 187) that Rome’s seven hills are not sequential, as are the “hills” of Rev 17:9.



8 Ibid., 948.

9 Readers may note that I have not analyzed the viewpoints of dispensational futurists regarding the seven heads of Revelation 17 (this is the viewpoint portrayed in the *Left Behind* series of novels). The reason for this is that the viewpoint, while wildly popular among evangelical Christians, is not taken seriously by any mainstream scholar of Revelation for sound, exegetical reasons. I do not feel, therefore, that this approach to Revelation will be helpful to Adventist students of Revelation 17, even though careful study of the chapter may lead to the conclusion (as I currently hold) that the vision focuses on the final events of earth’s history. This dismissal is based on quality of exegesis, not merely disagreement with dispensational futurist conclusions.

10 A quick look at standard references offers the following comments on Revelation 17 as a whole: GC 382, 440, 536 and 7BC 983 (Letter 232, 1899; MS 24, 1891; RH, Nov. 29, 1892). If there are any further clear comments on Revelation 17 in published or unpublished works, I would be delighted to hear about them (I have not had time to check the CD Rom).

11 Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, revised edition (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1944), 711.

12 C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation For You and Your Family* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985).

13 Ibid., 471-475.

14 Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 161-164. Though this little book has gone relatively unnoticed, Doukhan in these pages offers the single most extensive exegesis of this difficult passage by any church leader or scholar. I will share his view as a significant alternative to mine at the end of this essay.

15 Kenneth A. Strand, “The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?” in *Symposium on Revelation— Book II*, edited by Frank

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B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 191.

16 Ibid., 186.

17 Ibid., 191.

18 Ibid.

19 Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 515.

20 J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 287-288, cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 857.

21 Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 639; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, edited by Grant R. Osborne (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 147; James Moffat, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, The Expositor's Greek Testament, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 5:425; J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 196-197.

22 The crowns move from the heads (on the dragon in Rev 12) to the horns (on the sea beast in Rev 13). This mirrors the move from the head of the fourth best to the ten horns in Daniel 7. Just as the ten horns are later than the fourth beast in Daniel 7, the shift of crowns from heads to horns indicates the sea beast (which receives its authority from the dragon— Rev 13:2) is later than the dragon in point of history.

23 Beale seems to have come to the same conclusion on the basis of the Greek. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 875.

24 Some have suggested a connection between this beast and the Hydra of ancient Greek mythology. The Hydra was a nine-headed monster

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that was eventually destroyed by Hercules. But every time a head was chopped off, two grew in its place and the monster became more fearsome than before!

25 No Author, *Problems in Bible Translation*, Committee on Problems in Bible Translation, General Conference of SDAs (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 95-96.

26 He continually shows how the life of Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures with which the Jews were familiar (see, for example, Matt 1:22,23; 2:5,6,15,17,18). He uses Jewish terms without explanation.

27 Jewish terms are explained to his non-Jewish audience (compare, for example, Mark 14:12 with Matt 26:17).

28 There is, perhaps, no clearer illustration of this than the ten commandments, which come directly from the mouth of God (Exod 20:1-19), yet include significant elements of the cultural milieu within which they were received (including slavery, idolatry, and neighbors who possess oxen and donkeys).

29 The Greek construction in Rev 1:3 means to “hear with understanding.” The language assumes that the original readers of the book would have understood its basic message.

30 Leslie Hardinge, *Jesus Is My Judge: Meditations on the Book of Daniel* (Harrisburg, PA: American Cassette Ministries Book Division, 1996), 27-28, 134; Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding Daniel’s Prophecies* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1975), 42, 87.

31 While William Shea does not address this wording directly, he does comment, “The mode of revelation in these two cases was the same. The recipients, however, were quite different. The dream of chapter 2 was given to a pagan king initially for his own personal benefit; the dream of Daniel 7 was given directly to the prophet Daniel to communicate to God’s people.” William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7*, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, edited by George R. Knight (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), 155.

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32 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Book of Daniel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 7, edited by Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 100.

33 John J. Collins notes that the “vision formula” is also found in Dan 4:13, regarding Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great tree. John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*, vol. 20, edited by Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 76; idem, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, Frank Moore Cross, general editor (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 294.

34 I call the image an “idol” in part because of how the OT uses the term elsewhere: 2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chron 23:17; Amos 5:26, etc. But Nebuchadnezzar’s own reaction is instructive. In chapter 3 he knows exactly what to do with the “image,” set it up so people can worship it!

35 In both Genesis and Daniel things begin with a stormy sea (Gen 1:2; Dan 7:2). In both cases a “son of man” is given dominion over the animals.

36 Which of the two visions reflects a perspective closest to the mind of God? I would suggest Daniel’s in chapter 7. To human perspective the nations of the world are glorious things worthy of the utmost in human devotion 415-421.

Another Old Testament example of vision followed by interpretation is found in Zechariah 4, which has a pattern similar to Daniel 7. In Zechariah 4, however, the vision is extremely brief (Zech 4:2b-3), and is introduced by the interpreting angel (Zech 4:1-2a). The interpretation of the vision involves a lengthy back and forth dialogue between the prophet and the angel (Zech 4:1-2a, 4-14).

37 It could be argued that in the midst of the explanation of Dan 7:15-27 comes an addition to the vision. Dan 7:21-22 affirms, “As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.”

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This seems to be a visionary extension of verse 8 and of the judgment interlude in Dan 7:9-14. Daniel goes on to record the answer to his request for further information on the fourth beast and the Little Horn. “He gave me this explanation: ‘The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different. . . .’” Thus vision and interpretation is not rigidly separated, but the two sub-genres can be intermingled. This seems also to be the case in Revelation 17, where the chapter begins with a short explanatory introduction (following up on the vision of the bowl-plagues— Rev 17:1-2), followed by a short vision (17:3-6a), followed by a lengthy explanation of elements of the vision (17:6b-18).

38 Klaus Koch divides Daniel 8 into “vision” (*Schauung*— 2-14) and “meaning” (*Deutung*— 15-26). Klaus Koch, “Vom Prophetischen zum apokalyptischen Visionsbericht,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979, David Hellholm, editor, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 415-421.

39 Ellen White’s visions were described by her son as “flashlight pictures,” something like a silent movie. Sometimes an angel came to explain aspects of the vision, other times Ellen White had to research in commentaries and history books to gain an understanding of what God was trying to communicate to her.

40 Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 185.

41 This is true also of the four heads of the leopard. These are widely recognized to represent the four divisions of Alexander’s empire, three of which unquestionably survived as major nations for several hundred years. It is possible that heads may equate to specific Roman emperors in the apocryphal book of 4 Ezra (2 Esdras in the Apocrypha). Ezra sees a vision of an eagle with 12 wings and three heads (4 Ezra 11:1 - 12:9). The eagle is a reinterpretation of the fourth beast of Daniel 7 (4 Ezra 12:10-12). Some scholars feel that the three heads of the eagle (4 Ezra 11:29-35; 12:22-30) represent Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. See D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 194.

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42Note the discussion under “Implications for the Doukhan/Maxwell view” below. See also Doukhan, 161-164.

43Doukhan, 161-164.

44Ibid., 163.

45Ibid.

46Doukhan, 161-163.

47Beale, 876.

48Matt 24:30-31. The only “sign” of Jesus’ coming explicitly given in Matthew 24 is Jesus coming with the clouds. Cf. GC 640-641.