3 The Mystery Solved

Having dismissed the foregoing eight interpretations—conclusively, we think—let us now restate, and further discuss, our identification of the seven heads, as first suggested in the chapter on the leopard beast.

We showed that this symbolic animal was a perfect composite of the four successive creatures depicted in Dan. 7. We also quoted Maxwell, who pointed out: "the leopard had four heads, the other three had one each, and the fourth beast had ten horns,"[1]—although he did not follow up this valuable insight. According to the seven principles enumerated and discussed on the doorstep of Volume 2, especially the comparison of Scripture with Scripture, consistency, and prophetic augmentation, these must also be the heads that appear throughout the Apocalypse and to which Rev. 17:9-11 refers.

There are not twenty-eight heads, just as there are not forty horns, in Daniel and the Revelation. The seven heads are the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks (represented by four heads, of which the last in vital ways makes up the Greco-Roman Empire), and Christian Rome-Europe.

Important for this study is that detail which Maxwell noticed but failed to elaborate on. The Grecian leopard of Dan. 7 differs from the other beasts in the number of its heads, which is most significant. All the others, the lion, the bear, and the terrible fourth beast symbolize "universal kingdoms" of the ancient Middle East and the circum-Mediterranean world. The Greeks, however, were different: politically they were always divided. Theirs was never a universal kingdom, though their culture, religion, and philosophy became predominant throughout the Western world—not only in ancient times but for many centuries to come.

But did Alexander the Great not unite them, at least for his lifetime, into a single empire? That is a common misconception, which flies in the face of the facts. A large and influential portion of Hellas, the regions that lay in the West (particularly Italy and Sicily), never came under his control. And yet they make up an indispensable part of our story, for it is they that constitute the fourth head.

Three salient features link together the beasts of Rev. 12, 13, and 17, establishing a clear exegetical interrelationship. First, they all have seven heads and ten horns. Second, the chapter about the great red dragon chasing the virtuous woman and the one about the leopard beast involve the identical prophetic period of 1260 days/42 months/3½ years. Third, Rev. 12 and Rev. 17 deal with the same beast in relation to two different women, who are obviously being contrasted.

Unraveling the mystery of the heads is relatively easy if we bring together the data and hints from all three of. those chapters, plus additional details from the Apocalypse. Because the scholar's needs so often demand it, it is natural to concentrate on individual visions, as though they were separate prophecies; but that is not the sense in which they were written. Let us, moreover, bear in mind that our present-day division into chapters and verses did not yet exist in John's day. Though, for instance, Rev. 12 and 13 focus on somewhat different topics, they are also continuous with each other.

It is most insightful to read the entire Rev. 11-20 at a single sitting and see it as a coherent panorama of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, on both a cosmic and a terrestrial plane. Most of this is portrayed in the form of symbols. On the one hand we have the great red dragon, with his two beast assistants; on the other, the Lamb and angels, some of whom represent his people. The evil one and his human instruments blaspheme and fight against the Saviour, attacking and opposing the Law of God through persecution against those who keep it. Heaven responds with judgments, a theme resounding through all ten chapters. The

Second Coming figures prominently, as well as the events that follow it, climaxing in Rev. 20, when all the wicked and the devil that deceived them are exterminated—preparatory to the final two chapters about a new Jerusalem on a recreated earth.

But behind the Apocalypse additional Bible prophecies loom up and demand attention, particularly those of Daniel. As one coherent structure, that book also describes essentially the same panorama of conflict, blasphemy, and judgment. In chapters 2 and then 7-12, we read about kingdoms and powers—depicted largely though not exclusively through the symbols of beasts and horns—that fight against God, the Messiah, and his people. One of these, represented in both Dan. 7 and 8 as a Little Horn, opposes God's Covenant, desecrates his sanctuary, and even tries to change his Law.

But the Son of man receives the kingdom and comes back to the world, the beast is consigned to the flames, and those that faithfully served the Lord inherit the earth.

According to Rev. 17:9, 10, "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And *there* are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space."

The heads have a double application. On the one hand, they represent the hills of Rome where figurative Babylon is seated. Having already discussed this idea in another chapter, we will not here repeat ourselves. But the heads also symbolize seven ancient empires or socio-political powers.

Let us notice that the word *there* in the sentences quoted is lacking in the original text; it was supplied by the translators, which has led to misunderstanding on the part of some expositors. In the Greek language *there*, in the sense of *in that place*, is normally ἐκεῖ (ekei). If such a notion were meant, that word would surely have been used. A better and more normal rendering is consequently: "And they are seven kings . . ." This point is important: it negates inter alia the error of interpreting the heads as seven popes.

By John's time, five of these entities "have fallen," namely the Babylonian head, the Medo-Persian head, and three of the heads on the Grecian leopard of Dan. 7.

The "one is" of Rev. 17:10 refers to the pagan empire ruling the entire Mediterranean world in John's day. Politically and in a concrete sense it was Roman, but in culture, mind, and spirit it was largely Hellenic. The mental makeup of its rulers, including their view of ultimate reality, was deeply influenced by the Greeks, from the earliest period and throughout its history.

The key word for describing the empire of John's time is *Greco-Roman*. According to a number of authorities, some already quoted, it represented the final stage of the Hellenistic world. C.H. King describes it as a "Greco-Roman state."[2]

Prophetically this sixth head on the leopard beast and the dragon of Rev. 12, 13, and 17 is, then, related to and can—from a religious point of view—be identified with the fourth and final head of the leopard beast described in Dan. 7. This is further borne out by its symbolic representation as a Little Horn in Dan. 8 that is somehow linked to one of the four horns representing the ancient Greeks.

In Dan. 7, four leopard heads are allocated to the Greeks, "and dominion was given to it" (vs. 6). In Dan. 8, they are represented by four horns, "which stood up out of the nation" (vs. 22). Surely this means all the Greeks, and not only those living in the states resulting from the breakup of the empire created by Alexander and his Grand Army. One division, both ancient

and illustrious, lay in the West, though it was never conquered by that famous Macedonian. Nevertheless, it profoundly affected all of European history.

The Greeks at first lived mostly on both sides of the Aegean, that is, in western Asia as well as eastern Europe, and on their many islands. By 550 BC, they had occupied practically the entire coast of the Black Sea. They had also spread their colonies through much of the Mediterranean, everywhere planting their characteristic and often independent city-states, even on African soil just west of Egypt in Cyrenaica.

And then there was Western Hellas, part of which we shall be focusing on. This included parts of Italy (inter alia "Magna Graecia," Great Greece, as the Romans called it), much of Sicily, southernmost Gaul—especially Massilia (Marseilles)—and settlements in Sardinia, Corsica and western Spain.[3]

Though Western Hellas escaped Alexander's dominion, it fully belonged to what Daniel calls Grecia (Dan.8:21; 11:2). Nor was it small or in any sense a backward area. Its population was large and cultivated, for as Lerner and Burns point out, "Greek civilization in Italy and Sicily was as advanced as in Greece itself."[4]

Especially illustrious was the city of Syracuse. It stood at the southernmost tip of Sicily on its own little island, though with a connective causeway, which made it difficult to attack. Some fifty years before Alexander the Great, its powerful ruler, Dionysius the Elder (*c.* 430-378 BC), had made it "the richest and most populous city in the world."[5] From this center, he set out to build an empire. It included most of Sicily, Magna Graecia in southern Italy, and northern settlements along the Adriatic like Ancona and Hadria (ancient Venice), a gorgeous city arising on the estuarine marshland of the River Po.[6]

But centuries earlier, the Hellenic influence that would profoundly shape the Romans had already taken root on Italian soil. This was a long time before they acquired their polyglot empire or even lived in the city that bore their name. It had also affected their predecessors, the Etruscans. To begin with, the Greeks came as traders. First on Pithecusae, "a fertile island seven miles from the Campanian mainland," just off the northern tip of the Gulf of Cumae, which today is the Bay of Naples. Later they moved onshore and settled at Cumae (Cyme) itself.[7] What is also remarkable is that the very names "Greece" (*Graecia*) and "Hellas" originated in Italy![8]

The founders of Cyme came from different parts of Greece, perhaps as far back as 1000 BC. That city taught the Etruscans, and through them the Romans, the alphabet, art, and much about "the Greek gods and Greek religion. Heracles, Apollo, Castor, and Polydeuces became such familiar names in Italy that they came to be regarded as original Italian deities."[9] If the Romans had, according to the legend of Romulus and Remus, been suckled by a she-wolf and thereby imbibed the fierceness which so characterized them in later years, their babysitter and primary educator of any significance was that cultivated woman of Cyme. Later Hellenic instructors were Magna Graecia and Sicily to the South, before the Romans made significant contact with Athens and Alexandria.

They not only conquered the Greeks in the area surrounding Naples, Venice, Ancona, and Magna Graecia but extended citizenship to them, bringing them—like the rest of Italy—into a special relationship with themselves. That is, these Hellenic people were all incorporated as an intrinsic part of the heartland, which was not the case with other territories beyond the seas that later became part of the empire. Biological assimilation followed. The Italian Greeks became Romans.

Historically this was immensely significant. It is also indicated by prophecy in several contexts. The fourth beast of Dan. 7 has not only Roman iron teeth but also Grecian nails of bronze. Prophecy relates the Little Horn of Dan. 8 to four horns that represent the Greeks, as an outgrowth. The Antichristian beast, though it is centered in Rome, has a very leopard-like look.

The Romans had a threefold connection with the Greeks. First the Republic and later the Empire were transformed by their culture. Then they went on to conquer all of Greek-speaking Italy and Sicily, as well as the former Hellenistic kingdoms. Eventually this Roman-Hellenic amalgamation also gave birth to the Byzantine Empire.

Though conquered, the Greeks at no time became the junior partners of the men from Italy. This is how the eminent historian Michael Grant describes their situation: "Apart from the effects which this Greek culture had on the Romans, the Greek world, although politically subjected to Rome, had not been Romanized at all—and was never going to be either, to any marked degree. Extended rather than diminished in size, it was going to remain Greek. And, eventually, the Greeks got their revenge, when Constantine I the Great (AD 306-337) created his new capital Constantinople, on the site of the Greek city of Byzantium: with the logical result that some centuries later the language and culture of the surviving Byzantine, east Rome empire became, officially Greek. . ."[10]

The sixth head symbolizes the pagan Roman (actually the Greco-Roman) Empire as it existed in John's time and for the next two hundred years, from a cultural and a religious-philosophical point of view. It is this above all, and not the mere politics of antiquity, that interests Heaven vis-à-vis the church and is reflected in the prophetic scenario described by the Apocalypse.

Intellectually, Rome was largely the child of Hellas, conceived and reared by the western Greeks though subsequently also educated by Athens and Alexandria. It is true that ordinary Romans had little time for—indeed, they often despised—the Greeks; and much in their way of life, like the gladiatorial games, was clearly non-Hellenic. Yet, their collective educator, like so many of their individual pedagogues, was Grecian.

Their empire brought, as J.M. Roberts puts it, the culmination of the "Hellenistic Age (*c.* 300 BC-AD 300)," which "may be broadly defined as the period from the Greco-Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) to Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor (d. AD 337)." During that period, Middle Eastern syncretism not only further transformed the religion and philosophy of the pagan Romans. It also produced the Mediterranean apostasy: "The basic forms of worship of both the Jewish and Christian communities were heavily influenced in their formative period by Hellenistic practices, and this remains fundamentally unchanged to the present time."[11]

We realize that this interpretation is bound to meet with resistance from readers who have been taught that the four heads on the leopard in Dan. 7 symbolize four Hellenistic kingdoms resulting from the breakup of Alexander's empire after his death. They also tend to suppose that such a quadruple division remained a permanent feature for a substantial period of time.

But the witness of present-day historians uniformly contradicts such a view. They insist that after an initial period, during which the Conqueror's generals fought matters out among themselves, the Hellenistic East comprised only *three* major kingdoms—apart from many smaller fragments. This is how R. Malcolm Errington, professor of Ancient History at Philipps-Universität in Marburg, Germany, summarizes the final situation: "A powerful po-

litical structure had developed out of the empire of Alexander, in which three Macedonian ruling families controlled the world of the eastern Mediterranean until the Roman conquest. In Macedonia itself the Antigonids came to power; in Syria, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Iran, the Seleukids; and in Egypt, the Ptolemies."[12]

Our favorite Bible Commentary, with its enlightening maps, says much the same. It shows that in 323 BC, just after Alexander's death, his former empire was ruled by *five* men: Antipater, Lysimachus, Antigonus, Eumenes, and Ptolemy. A dozen years later, in 311 BC, there were still *five* of them, although some names were now different: Cassander, Lysimachus, Antigonus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy. Only ten years further on, in 301 BC, they were reduced to *four*: Cassander, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy. But then, a mere twenty years later, in 281 BC Lysimachus was killed, and only *three* divisions remained: Macedonia, the Seleucid Empire (which later consisted only of Syria), and Egypt. And this last-mentioned setup lasted for more than a century, until all these territories were conquered by and incorporated into the Roman Empire.[13]

How then can we explain the prophecies of Dan.7: 6, Dan. 8:8, and Dan. 11:4, which all depict a fourfold division? By 280 BC, the quartet of Cassander, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy was no more. Yet according to Dan. 8, the four horns that symbolize the Greeks were destined to persist until the advent of the Little Horn, the Romans, long after the death of those men. The difficulty is resolved by adding to the three Hellenistic horns the Western Greeks, as we have done. We also note that, in view of the important role they have played in history, their omission would have been inexplicable.

The entity represented by the seventh prophetic head still lay in the future for John, who saw it in vision; it had "not yet come." Located on all three apocalyptic beasts as portrayed in Rev. 12, 13, and 17, it parallels the head on the fourth beast of Dan. 7, which also bears the Little Horn.

As we saw in Volume One, as a whole the last-mentioned creature symbolizes not simply Rome but also Western Europe. It corresponds to the legs of iron . . . plus the feet of iron mixed with clay on the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. We think, moreover, that it is not just Roman in a general, generic sense but particularly symbolizes Orthodox and Catholic Christendom, from the era of Constantine down to our day.

In its genesis, this head coincides with what historians call the "Lower Empire," which followed the anarchy of the third century. As Hugh R. Trevor Roper puts it, "there are two successive Roman Empires."[14] The first one, created by Augustus and still thriving in the time of John, was characterized by a confident *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) throughout the Mediterranean world. But then the Troubled Century intervened with its many short-lived emperors, barbarian invasions, currency collapse, and pestilence, which killed a third of the population. After the establishment of the second empire by Diocletian, the key figure was Constantine. Through his conversion, he transformed it into the beginning of Christendom. This is the seventh head of Rev. 17.

An emperor converted to a syncretic, Mythraic form of Christianity, Constantine established a theocracy. Into it, he brought the religious prerogatives he had inherited from his pagan predecessors, especially as reflected in two titles, which were closely interrelated. According to the first he was supposedly "God on earth," as were his Byzantine successors and later the Russian czars. As Napoleon Bonaparte said to Alexandr I, "I see that you are an emperor and a pope at the same time. How useful."[15] The Roman Caesars, personifying the

state of Rome, demanded worship. In this, they continued a tradition inherited from Mesopotamia and particularly Egypt, which reached them through Alexander the Great as well as the Hellenistic kings who succeeded him. Often this was associated with sun worship. The emperor Constantine and those around him adapted this form of address. Instead of being a deity in his own right, he would be God *on earth*, as well as the *Pontifex Maximus* ("high priest").[16] The latter was the second title inherited from the pagan Roman emperors. It represented Constantine as the intercessor between heaven and earth. To this, he added other titles: *Bishop of Bishops* and *Vicarius Christi* (the "Vicar of Christ"),[17] as well as *Isapostolos* ("Equal of the Apostles")[18]

This theocratic conception, together with the titles that attended its birth, transformed the empire and Europe for centuries to come. As Roberts puts it, "Constantine I the Great, the first Roman emperor to profess Christianity, initiated not only the evolution of the empire into a Christian state but also provided the impulse for a distinctively Christian culture that prepared the way for the growth of Byzantine and Western medieval culture." This historian goes even further. He says, "by the official establishment of Christianity," plus his other arrangements, Constantine "had registered a decisive break with the tradition of classical Rome. Ultimately, and unwittingly, he was founding Christian Europe and, therefore, the modern world."[19]

As the Byzantine Empire declined and later headed for extinction at the hands of the Turks, the pattern of closely linking church and state persisted in the West. There the bishop of Rome became the kingpin of Christendom. He arrogated to himself the very titles that formerly belonged to Constantine and other Byzantine emperors: *God on earth, Pontifex Maximus, Vicarius Christi*. For many medieval centuries, the popes—aspiring to an identical dignity—strove to be both religious and political rulers, especially in Italy, where they were literally monarchs over the Papal States until 1870. As Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), an immensely erudite man and "one of the greatest English political thinkers,"[20] expressed it, the papacy was "no more than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof."[21] Though they constantly had to fight a sometimes losing battle against the kings and emperors of Europe, who cherished similar ambitions, the pontiffs exerted themselves with every resource at their disposal to preserve their double Roman heritage as both political and religious rulers.

The Vatican city state of today, with the pope as an absolute monarch, continues that tradition. Its potency, despite the diminutive size of its physical territory, was dramatically underlined by the funeral of Pope John Paul II in April 2005. It was attended by more than two hundred VIP's from all over the world, including President George W. Bush and two of his predecessors. This is how Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Protestant Italian of Waldensian parentage, describes that amazing scene:

"Never before mankind had seen three United States Presidents kneeling for about five minutes in front of a pope's casket, heads bowed, as choral music filled the majestic St. Peter's Cathedral. Joining the American delegation were first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice.

"More than 100 official delegations attended the funeral, including four kings, five queens, and more than 70 prime ministers. Countless dignitaries, cardinals, bishops, and over 700,000 people rubbed shoulders in St. Peter's during the three hours ceremony of John Paul II's funeral."[22]

To us today, the concept of Christendom has rather faded, but for most of history this was a key concept in the Mediterranean world. As Margaret Aston points out, into the latter part

of the fourteenth century it was still "more meaningful than Europe."[23] Through all the medieval centuries, most people lived and died in local communities under feudal lords, who often fought one another. For the ordinary person, travel was dangerous and roads uncertain. Countries, as we understand them, existed only in a rudimentary way. What really mattered was feudalism, based on the family relationships of the ruling classes.

Not even language, that striking national characteristic of our day, was useful in defining Europe. The majority of educated people, mostly clerics, did their reading and writing in Latin. Vernacular speech forms did exist, but only as a multitude of dialects. For instance, "Dante reckoned that there were more than a thousand varieties of Italian vernacular in his day." Only gradually, especially with the help of printing, invented halfway through the fifteenth century, this profusion was whittled down and unitary languages emerged.[24]

Only by 1500, Europe—as we understand the concept—really emerged. The national states were coming into focus, travel was more common, printing proliferated and rapidly spread knowledge far and wide, Bartholomeu Dias and Vasco da Gama opened the way to the Far East, Columbus found a way to reach America, and humankind began to think on a different wavelength.

But until those days not Europe but Christendom predominated, and is still not an outmoded concept, although it has—for the time being—retreated into the background of people's thinking. We shall later be returning to this point.

Represented by the seventh head, Christendom survived the ever clearer subdivision into a Byzantine and a Western Empire. It also survived the fragmentation of the latter into the states of Europe and for many centuries found its center in the papacy.

In further chapters, we shall have more to say about this entity. Here we only wish to point out that for interpreting the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation the contrasting expressions *Pagan Rome* and *Christian Rome*—so popular with many writers over more than a century—need to be used with caution.

Pagan Rome is a good and well-established synonym for the Greco-Roman Empire, and we do not wish to find fault with it. But when did that period end? With the Edict of Milan in 313, just after Constantine's conversion, or when he founded New Rome (Constantinople) in 330 as an explicitly Christian city.

Paganism lingered on for some time. Indeed, it blended with Christianity to create a syncretic religion but overtly went into swift decline. It was largely extinguished by Theodosius I, the Great (379-95), the last emperor who ruled over both the Eastern and Western Empires. He "is known for his imposition of orthodox Christianity on the empire"[25] and making it "an ingredient of good citizenship." Under this powerful ruler, "many pagan temples were closed or even destroyed"[26]—including the celebrated shrine at Delphi[27]—so that in the writings of his contemporary, Bishop Ambrose of Milan (374-97), the words "'Roman' and 'Christian' are almost synonyms."[28] The ancient capital Rome, it is true, at least in the fourth century, still remained a largely pagan city. "Dominated by proud senatorial families,"[29] it could hold out against the emperor. Yet within a hundred years or thereabouts most of these had also switched allegiance, and "just as the Roman upper class had once been associated with state paganism, so now it was tied to Christianity."[30]

In the light of such facts, it is peculiar to suggest, as various writers have done, that Pagan Rome endured until 476, when the Western Empire fell, or otherwise until the time of Justinian I during the Reconquest, in 538. It was in this year that the besieging Ostrogoths failed to capture the eternal city and destroy the papacy. However, as our previous volume has

shown, these people, too, were not pagans but members of the Germanic Church, though not Catholics. Their King Theodoric and his successors had ruled over Italy since 493.

No, from Constantine to Justinian and afterwards the Roman Emperors, in the East as well as the West, were Christians, every man jack of them—except for Julian the Apostate (331-63), who ruled only briefly, a mere nineteen and a half months. These autocratic rulers used every means at their disposal to ensure that their subjects conformed to their imperial whims and wishes. The name Christian Rome (or, better, Christendom) should, properly speaking, be used to describe the later, second Roman Empire and its European successor states, from the time of Constantine onward.

Many prophetic writers, however, apply this label to Catholicism or the papacy only in a later era, especially during the 1260 year-days of 538-1798. Although we also recognize this period as prophetically important, it does not coincide with the pontificate, whose beginnings antedate it by several centuries and which now—already more than two hundred years later—is still very much with us.

Christian Rome is a confusing expression if applied exclusively to medieval, Catholic Europe. But does it not acquire a special meaning because the pope in the Middle Ages lorded it over all the kings and emperors in a secular as well as an ecclesiastical sense? This is another misconception, a myth, abundantly contradicted by history. It is true that before the Reformation the Catholic Church had well-nigh universal sway over every part of Western Europe . . . though only in matters of religion, because the kings and emperors cooperated with the Vatican. Except when they were weak, they did not, however, knuckle under to the popes in other matters. Powerful rulers like Charlemagne, Otto I, Philip the Fair, and Charles V were all good Catholics; but they also sought to dominate the pontiffs of their time. Sometimes they even believed that *they* were the head of the church.

This is particularly well illustrated by the reign of Philip IV le Bel or the Fair (1268-1314), who ruled over France. At the jubilee of 1300, that papal braggart Boniface VIII (1294-1303) had worn a crown and waved a sceptre, shouting to the throng of pilgrims, "I am Caesar—I am Emperor!"[31] For two hundred years, from the time of Hildebrand in the eleventh century, the popes had largely enjoyed both ecclesiastical and temporal supremacy. To insist on his own prerogatives and power, Boniface issued pretentious bulls, *Clericis Laicos* (1296), claiming tax exemption for the church, and *Unam Sanctam* (1302), to assert "the supremacy over the temporal power."[32] But how soon his reign and life would be over!

Philip tolerated no nonsense from anybody, including the pope. His ancestors, the Capetians, had for three hundred years been cultivating the idea that their monarchy was ordained of God, so he "believed the French throne to be more sacred than the papal one."[33]

This is the man whom Boniface dared to excommunicate; he was also about to do the same to France itself. The king acted against him promptly. In 1303, he sent his agents, who boldly manhandled the pope. This enraged the aged pontiff into insanity and death. When his successor, Benedict XI, was also considering excommunication, he died—apparently poisoned. The next pope, Clement V (a Frenchman) feared the king so much that he helped him through the Inquisition to destroy the Knights Templar, power bastion of the papacy. He also annulled the *Clericis Laicos* and the *Unam Sanctam*, relocating himself with the Roman curia to Avignon in France,[34] where the king and his spies could keep an eye on them.

As Southern points out to conclude an enlightening analysis: "The situation at the end of the Middle Ages tended—though with much greater complication and political awareness—to

approximate to the situation at the beginning. The secular ruler became the residuary legatee of ecclesiastical power."[35]

Nowhere does the Bible suggest that for 1260 years the popes would rule over Europe in an absolute sense. It does, however, in Dan. 7 as in Rev. 13, depict the Antichrist as a power that would for this period persecute the saints of the Most High.

A cause of further confusion is to equate Christian Rome with the Holy Roman Empire. The latter name describes the medieval symbiosis between church and state, from Christmas day in AD 800, when the pope crowned Charlemagne as a new Augustus Caesar.

For reasons such as these, we prefer the word Christendom, which designates the entire period from Constantine to the present.

After speaking about the heads, the Apocalypse goes on to say, "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven" (Rev. 17:11). What entity is this? It is the scarlet beast, which "shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition" (vs. 8). As a previous chapter has already demonstrated, it is identical with the great red dragon of Rev. 12. In other words, what these verses predict is that the devil will yet throw off the mask and directly take over the government of the world.

There will be an ultimate fulfillment of the Redeemer's prediction about false Christs that will seek to counterfeit his return to the world (Matt. 24:24). The apostle Paul may also have had this in mind when he wrote, "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

According to Ellen White, the devil will very boldly try to imitate the Second Coming: "In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation." But those who truly serve the Lord will penetrate his disguise, because he will teach that he has changed the Sabbath, and he "is not permitted to counterfeit the manner of Christ's advent."[36]

The eighth kingdom, with Satan as the overt ruler of our planet, may soon be set up in what a deluded world will consider the prosperous and peaceful millennium that many have been expecting. For a short time, the devil can enjoy he worship that he has always craved. But suddenly the real Christ returns, and slays all finally impenitent and wicked people by the brightness of his coming. Satan's plans being interrupted, he cannot yet proceed with his plan to assume direct control of the human race.

Instead, he is suddenly thrust into the "bottomless pit," what the original language calls the ἄβυσσος (ábyssos, "abyss"). We have already noted that this is the very word which the Septuagint uses where it describes creation: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon *the face of the deep*" (Gen. 1:2. emphasis added). John's original readers in the seven churches, Greeks who knew no Hebrew, exclusively used this translation.

Abyssos also suitably describes our planet at the end of days. Its atmosphere stripped away, it is a gloomy wreck of its former self. For a thousand years, it will revert to a state of chaos similar to the one which existed before the Creator said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). Bound by the chain or circumstances, Satan has only the fallen angels to keep him dismal company. Together, with fear and trembling, they await the Third Coming of Christ, when the damned of all the ages are to be resurrected and they themselves must also face the last judgment. (Rev. 20:5, 7)

So it is after the thousand years that the eighth kingdom, headed by the devil, fully—though briefly—becomes a reality. The resurrected lost ones, who in their lifetime chose and are now compelled to be his subjects, will include his followers from all seven of those prophetically important periods—when Babylon, Medo-Persia, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Papacy with Christendom in tow enjoyed their day in the sun. In that sense, the eighth or dragon kingdom is "of the seven."

At this time, too, they will obey their elected leader as he gathers them together for a final, desperate onslaught to overthrow the kingdom of God with an ill-fated march on the New Jerusalem. This is to be the devil's journey to perdition, as it must be theirs. Read the graphic details, as Scripture portrays them:

"And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone . . ." (Rev. 20:7-10)

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