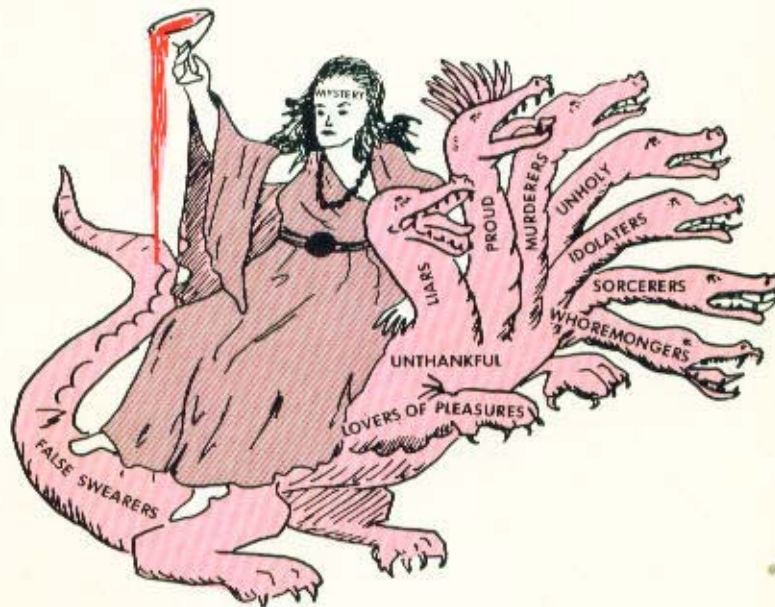


THE GREAT DELUSION

A Scriptural Analysis of
Christianity's "Future Antichrist"



BLESSED IS HE that reads
aloud the words of this prophecy, and
blessed are those who hear, and who
keep what is written therein; for the
time is short. REVELATION 1:3 (RSV)

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(All Scriptural quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.)



THE GREAT DELUSION

Prophecy Is A Popular Topic Today

Bible prophecy is becoming an extremely popular subject for discussion in today's Christian world. Ten or fifteen years ago it was difficult to find any books on prophecy in Bible book stores, but now entire shelves are stocked with them. Furthermore, we find in today's Christian television and radio programs that prophecy is becoming an increasingly popular subject, and as time goes on, it seems to be gaining a wider audience than ever before.

Many people have now realized that the return of the Jews to their land and the rebirth of the nation of Israel is an example of Bible prophecy being fulfilled in our day. They further have seen that prophecy indicates Jesus Christ will soon return and Russia will eventually attack and temporarily defeat Israel. However, when we examine in more detail the events which will occur at the time of the end, we find there are many interpretations as to when Jesus will return and how the end of this age will come about.

Our Interpretation Of Prophecy Does Matter

It may appear that it does not matter how we interpret prophecy, for how can prophetic events affect our way of life and our salvation? If we look carefully into the Bible, however, we find examples indicating that it does matter how we view Bible prophecy.

One clear example is found in Matthew 24 where Jesus warned the Jews about the coming invasion of the Romans into Jerusalem. Jesus said:

"So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let

him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle." (Matthew 24:15-18)

To the Jews that were living at that time, this was a very important prophecy because the Roman army later surrounded Jerusalem and the Jews who understood the words of Jesus fled from the city and were saved. Those who did not correctly understand this prophecy stayed in the city to be trapped by the Roman army and die in the siege that followed.

Another clear example is found in the Jews' rejection of Jesus. If the Jewish people had correctly understood the Old Testament prophecies which indicated that their Messiah would have to suffer and even die before he could reign as king, then they would not have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Tragically, most of the Jews did not understand Bible prophecy correctly, since they expected the Messiah to overthrow the Romans in their day and then establish the kingdom in Israel. **Their wrong understanding of prophecy caused them to reject Jesus Christ!**

Certainly from these two examples we can see how necessary it is for us to have a correct understanding of Bible prophecies. We also live in an age when we are looking for the Messiah to come and establish his kingdom. No one desires to be in the position where he or she might reject Jesus when he comes because of an incorrect understanding of the prophetic events related to his second coming. Yet the framework has already been laid throughout Christianity for most Christians to do exactly that. A sudden and rapid change has recently occurred within most Christian churches that has completely altered their prior understanding of the events at Jesus' second coming. Many of these churches and their leaders have abandoned the original teachings of their founders on this subject and have replaced them with the belief that a satanic man (the future Antichrist) will control the world for 7 years just prior to the return of Jesus. This false teaching is preparing millions of Christians throughout the earth to reject Jesus at his return because they will be convinced, by the things he will do, that he is "the Antichrist" and will oppose him.

What Does the Bible Teach?

However before we examine the ideas of the future Antichrist theory, let us review what the scriptures teach regarding the return of Jesus. The Bible describes several specific events which Jesus, acting under God's authority, will accomplish when he returns to the earth. It is important to note and understand these events since most in Christendom today are unfamiliar with them.

Five of the most prominent ones are as follows:

1. THE MILITARY DEFEAT OF RUSSIA — In Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 the prophet describes the invasion of Israel by Russia's army. Though Russia is not mentioned specifically, the names given: Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal exactly correspond to the geographical area of Russia at the time Ezekiel wrote.

*"Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and **prophecy against him** . . ." (38:2, NASB)*

According to the prophecy, Russia will attack the young nation of Israel —

" . . . in the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land where people were gathered from many nations upon the mountains of Israel . . . You will advance . . . you will be like a cloud covering the land . . ." (38:8-9)

In the midst of an apparent victory, Russia will meet with sudden destruction. God working and manifested through Jesus and the immortalized saints, will defeat the invading Russian army.

" . . . when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, says the Lord God, my wrath will be roused . . . I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain upon him . . . torrential rains and hailstones, fire and brimstone. So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord." (38:17-23, see also 39:1-6)

2. A NEW COVENANT TO BE MADE WITH ISRAEL — Following the destruction of the Russian army, the Jews in Israel will realize that it was Jesus who saved them from certain annihilation and will recognize him for the first time as their Savior (Zechariah 12:10-14). A new covenant will then be made by Jesus with the Jews —

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah . . ." (Jeremiah 31:31)

"I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore." (Ezekiel 37:26-28, see also Jeremiah 32:36-41 and Romans 11:25-27)

3. THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

— In Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48 and again in Zechariah 14:20-21 there is a clear indication that the temple first built by Solomon, rebuilt by Nehemiah and destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans, will be reestablished in Jerusalem. It will be situated on Mt. Zion, and animal sacrifices will again be offered by the people.

"And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'Holy to the Lord.' And the pots in the house of the Lord shall be as the bowls before the altar; and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the flesh of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day." (Zechariah 14:20-21, see also Isaiah 56:7)

4. JESUS TO REIGN FROM JERUSALEM AS KING OF THE EARTH — Fulfilling the promise God gave to David 3000 years ago (2 Samuel 7:8-16), Jesus will establish Jerusalem as the capital of his world-wide government and reign on the restored throne of his father David.

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:32-33, see also Isaiah 9:7)

All nations and people will look to Jerusalem as the source of God's teachings and will visit the city to learn of His ways. If any of the people refuse to go up to Jerusalem, punishment will be brought upon them.

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:2-3, see also Jeremiah 3:17 and Zechariah 14:16-19)

5. PEACE WILL BE RESTORED ON THE EARTH — Once Jesus has established himself as King over the earth he will bring about a time of peace throughout the world, between all countries.

"He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:4, see also Isaiah 9:6 and Zechariah 9:9-10)

What Do The Churches Teach?

When we compare these five accomplishments of Jesus (according to the Bible), with five things “the Antichrist” will supposedly do (according to the popular idea in Christianity today), the resemblance is striking. Around the world Christian leaders are warning of the coming of a man (“the Antichrist”) who with satanic powers will rule the world for 7 years. They claim his initial act will be to **defeat Russia** when it invades Israel. They believe he will then form a special agreement or **covenant with the Jews** guaranteeing them peace and security. Part of this agreement will allow the Jews to **rebuild their temple in Jerusalem** and begin to again offer animal sacrifices. They further teach that “the Antichrist” will establish his **headquarters in Jerusalem**, claiming to be God on earth, and require all people throughout the world to worship him and follow his teachings. Finally, these leaders state that once “the Antichrist” has taken over control of the earth **he will establish peace** in all nations.

Notice the exact parallels between the Bible’s description of what Jesus will do when he returns, and the anticipated acts of “the Antichrist”. This false teaching contains within it the distinct possibility of a disastrous outcome for the millions of Christians who believe it now, or who will be led to believe it in the near future.

Christian Leaders to Oppose Jesus

The rejection of Jesus when he returns by the Christian leaders appears imminent. They are not even looking for the return of Jesus to the earth before the 7 year reign of “the Antichrist”. Consequently, when Russia soon attacks Israel as the leaders expect, they will begin to declare to both their followers and the rest of the world that “the Antichrist” will soon emerge. Christian circles throughout the earth will then intensify their warnings when they witness the sudden destruction of Russia in Israel. Furthermore, when it is learned that the conqueror of the Russians has established a special covenant with the Jews, has called for the temple to be rebuilt and begins to set up his government with Jerusalem as its capital, the Christian leaders will become ecstatic.

Newspapers, radios and televisions in every city will carry the stories of the mysterious occurrences in Israel. They will describe how the Russian army has been destroyed by an unknown force, and how the leader of the victorious army has declared himself to be king over the whole earth. At the same time the media will also

carry the united appeal of the Christian leaders as they frantically warn their followers and all others to resist the man in Jerusalem who claims to be from God. They will label him "the Antichrist" and sternly rebuke any who would follow him, warning that their end will be certain death.

The united efforts of the Christian leaders will generate a high degree of resistance towards Jesus when he establishes his throne in Jerusalem. His appeals to the world that he is in fact the Son of God who has returned from heaven, and his attempts to prove his authority by using his miraculous power will be met by stiff opposition from the leaders. Claiming he possesses satanic powers, which enable him to perform his miracles, the leaders will join forces to denounce him. For the first time in the history of the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant churches their leaders will publicly unite together, declaring that the man in Jerusalem must be opposed. Inevitably, the followers of these leaders will confidently join in the opposition. Very likely others who have spent little time reading the Bible or attending church will be easily influenced when they witness events they cannot explain (e.g. the sudden destruction of the Russian army), especially if the Christian leaders are all declaring the same thing: "Reject the impostor, he is the Antichrist!"

Impossible? It Happened ONCE BEFORE!

When Jesus returns to the earth and is opposed as being "the Antichrist", it will not be the first time he will be rejected by the very people who claim to be looking for his coming. There is a powerful lesson to be learned from the reasons that led to the denial and crucifixion of Jesus by the Jews when he came the first time. If someone had told the Jews in Israel before Jesus began his ministry that they would soon reject their Messiah, no one would have believed it. Likewise, who would have thought that people from the same crowds who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David", and spreading their garments and palm branches before Him, would but one week later be crying out "Crucify him, crucify him!"

It must be remembered that before Jesus began his ministry the Jews in Israel were not completely ignorant as to the nearness of the coming of their Messiah. On the contrary, there were several reasons why more than a few of the people expected their Messiah soon to reveal himself. First of all there was Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27), which stated the coming of the

“anointed one” would be approximately 490 years (70 weeks of years multiplied by 7 days per week), after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Many of the Jews were well aware that in 456 BC, this very command was given by Artaxerxes. Secondly, almost everyone in Israel would have heard of the wise men who visited Herod at the time Jesus was born, looking for the infant who was to become the king of the Jews. They so convinced Herod the Messiah had been born that he ordered every male child two years old and under, in the area of Bethlehem, to be put to death in an attempt to destroy Jesus. Thirdly, the message of John the Baptist had spread throughout the nation. He urged the people to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and taught that another would come after him who would be far greater than himself.

Following his baptism by John, Jesus journeyed throughout Israel preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and healing the various diseases and infirmities of the people. His fame quickly spread throughout the nation because of the authority with which he spoke and the wonderful miracles he performed. The four gospels record two separate incidents when he fed over 4000 men, plus women and children, from a small amount of food; three different occasions when he raised a person from the dead; and numerous times when the lame were made to walk, the blind were given sight and the dumb were able to speak. It is little wonder that the Jews began to look toward Jesus as being the long expected Messiah spoken of by their prophets. If the comments of the people are examined it is evident they recognized this man from Nazareth was more than a prophet. On several occasions they referred to him as the Son of David and at other times were quoted as saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.”

Why then did the Jews reject the very person who had brought hope and healing to Israel and clamor for the release of a terrorist and murderer instead? The answer can be found upon a close look at the incidents that occurred in the last week of Jesus' life before his crucifixion.

A Sudden Betrayal

Following his entry into Jerusalem when the people hailed him as their king (Luke 19:38) and eagerly expected the establishment of his Kingdom (Mark 11:9-10), Jesus spent several days in the city teaching the people and his disciples. There is every indication that he continued to do this right up to the night on which he was betrayed by Judas. During these last few days spent in Jerusalem the entire city would have become aware that Jesus was there. The stories of the marvelous works he had performed

would have been talked about in every home and on every street corner. There was hardly anyone in Jerusalem at that time who had failed to hear of this exceptional man.

But then overnight the people turned against Jesus. Ignoring the kindness, love, dedication, and mighty work shown to them for the past 3½ years they turned their backs on him and sought his death. The reason for this sudden betrayal is clearly indicated in Matthew 27:20 —

The CHIEF PRIESTS and THE ELDERS persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

Mark records in chapter 15, verse 11 —

The CHIEF PRIESTS stirred up the crowd to have him (Pilate) release for them Barabbas instead.

Responding to the cries and appeals of their religious leaders the people chose to reject their Messiah. Who in Israel would have believed it possible?? Had they been familiar (as they should have been) with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the need for the sacrifice and suffering of the Messiah before he acquired his Kingship, the Jews might not have acted so quickly. But their dependence upon the religious leaders for direction led them to denounce their Savior.

And what of today? Because of the popularity and general acceptance of the "future Antichrist" theory, Christians everywhere are being prepared to follow in the same footsteps as their Jewish counterparts at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Most of today's Christians have come to rely solely on their leaders for an understanding of the prophecies concerning the return of Christ and read their Bibles only to learn of the moral standards to be upheld in their life. While the latter is extremely important, it by no means fulfills the responsibility of every follower of Jesus Christ to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Therefore, with our Bibles in hand, let us examine the true meaning of the Scriptural passages which are misunderstood by the supporters of the "future Antichrist" theory.

**An Examination of the Relevant
Scriptural Prophecies**

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELEVANT SCRIPTURAL PROPHECIES



Daniel 2

Let us start in Daniel 2 with Nebuchadnezzar's image because this prophecy seems to lay the framework for the history of man from Daniel's time up to the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. In Daniel 2 we find the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar was shown an image made of four different metals. These metals indicated the four, and **only four**, humanly governed world empires that would arise in the course of man's history from Daniel's day on.

King Nebuchadnezzar was told "Thou art this head of gold" (v.38), relating the head of the image to the Babylonian Empire which flourished around 606-538 BC (see picture on page 15). After that came the Medo-Persian Empire (538-331 BC), which corresponded to the breast and arms of silver on the image (vs. 32,39). Then followed the Grecian Empire (331-68 BC) led by Alexander the Great, which related to the belly and thighs of bronze (vs.32,39). The last world empire to arise was the Roman Empire (68 BC-476 AD), corresponding to the two legs of iron on the image (vs.33,40). In this way, God revealed through this vision the **four** world empires which would arise before the kingdom of God would be set up on the earth.

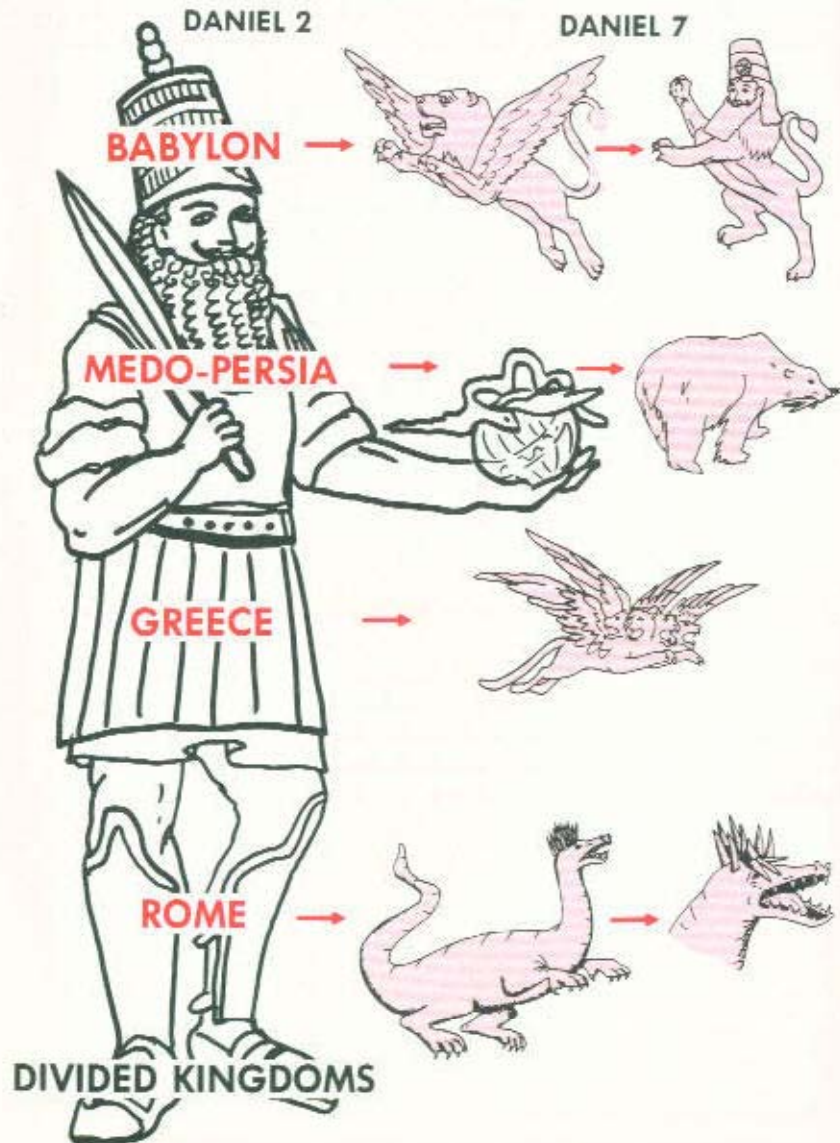
The last parts of the image, its feet and toes, were made of iron and clay, showing that the Roman world would be made up of many different nations from the end of the Roman Empire until Jesus (the stone) came to break in pieces the kingdoms of men, and set up his kingdom on earth (vs.33-35,41-45). So we should expect that the Roman dominion would be made up of many different nations, some strong (iron) and some weak (clay), just before the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Daniel 7

A few years later, Daniel was shown another vision (Daniel 7:1-8) about four great beasts arising out of the sea. In verses 17-18 we are given the explanation that these four beasts are four kings or kingdoms that would arise out of the earth, and after them, the saints of the Most High will receive and possess the kingdom for

ever. Certainly there is a relationship between the four parts of Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 2 (which indicated the four world empires that would arise before God's Kingdom) and these four beasts in chapter 7.

In Daniel 7 we read of four great beasts arising out of the sea. The first beast was like a lion (v.4) and it corresponds to the head of Nebuchadnezzar's image (see picture below), representing the



Babylonian Empire. The next beast was like a bear and it related to the breast and arms of the image (the Medo-Persian Empire). The third beast was like a leopard (v.6), which corresponds to the belly and thighs of the image (the Grecian Empire). Next we read of a fourth beast (vs.7-8) which relates to the two legs of the image (the Roman Empire). This last beast was "terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong" indicating the great power of the Roman Empire, and it had "ten horns" showing that it would eventually be divided between ten kings or nations.¹ As Daniel watched, three of the horns (the Vandals, Lombards, and Huns) were plucked up by the roots or destroyed when another little horn (the Holy Roman Empire) came up among them. This little horn had eyes and a mouth, and spoke great things (vs.19-20).

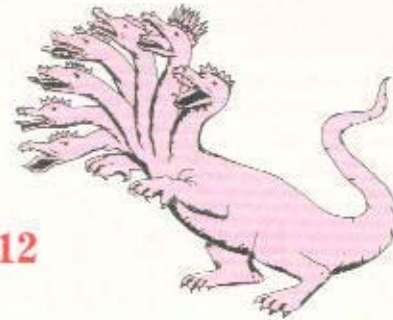
Since Daniel wanted to know more about this fourth beast, he was told in verses 19-27 that the beast would have teeth of iron and claws of bronze, indicating the large geographical area this beast would powerfully dominate. In Nebuchadnezzar's image iron was linked to the Roman Empire and bronze to the Grecian Empire. Thus this fourth beast would incorporate the authority and dominion of both empires.

Daniel was also told that the little horn on this beast will speak words against the Most High and it will make war on the saints and prevail over them for a "time, two times and half a time" (v.25) or 1260 years². After this period, the "Ancient of Days" will come and the saints will receive the kingdom. Thus this prophecy indicated that a great power would arise out of the Roman dominion that would blaspheme God and persecute the saints for many years.

Up to this point then, we have found that Daniel 2 clearly indicates the four world empires that would arise, and Daniel 7 refers to these empires again, giving us more detail especially of the fourth empire (the Roman Empire). These two chapters of Daniel form the backbone for interpreting many of the prophecies in the Bible, and for this reason we have considered them first. The remaining prophecies will be studied on the basis of these clear prophecies in Daniel.

¹ The ten nations are: 1) Huns, 2) Vandals, 3) Visigoths, 4) Burgundians, 5) Gepidae, 6) Lombards, 7) Franks, 8) Suevi, 9) Alans, 10) Bavarians. These nations became the rulers of the divided Roman dominion when the empire fell during the 5th century.

² A time refers to a one-year cycle or 360 days. Two times would be 720 days, and a half a time, 180 days, thus giving a total of 1260 days. Since many prophetic time periods are based on one day representing one year (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:5-6; Daniel 9:24), the 1260 days here refer to 1260 years of the little horn's authority over the saints.



Revelation 12

Keeping in mind God's revelation through Daniel, we now turn to the Revelation of Jesus Christ. At some point around 96 AD, while John was on the Island of Patmos, he received the Revelation from an angel of God. In the first two verses of chapter one, we are told that it was given to show things that "must soon take place." In other words, the Revelation was given to predict events **that would begin occurring about the time John copied it down** (96 AD) Furthermore, he was also shown other major events that would occur throughout history **from** that time until the second coming of Jesus Christ and the setting up of the Kingdom of God.

The very first description in Revelation 12 of a woman in heaven, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and crown of 12 stars on her head indicates to us that events in this and other chapters **cannot be taken literally**. Back in the first verse of chapter one we are clearly told that the Revelation was "signified", which means it was given in signs or symbols. Therefore we should expect to find many symbols used throughout the Revelation and we must carefully look into their meaning.

Women in the Bible are sometimes used to represent religious systems (see 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23; Isaiah 47:7-9; Ezekiel 16). Therefore, the "woman" in Revelation 12:1 can be taken to symbolize the Christian religious system after the time of John. The "male child" of verse 5 then, would be a great Christian leader brought forth to rule the world.

If we look back in history to 320 AD, we find the great historical event described in Revelation 12. The Roman Empire at this time was ruled and dominated by pagans. A great leader arose named Constantine, who was converted to Christianity. His goal was to conquer the Roman Empire and he determined to make it Christian. However, the pagan military power of the empire strongly resisted him as depicted in symbols by "the Dragon and his angels" (the pagans) fighting against "Michael and his angels" (the Christians). Eventually Constantine, in the name of Christ, defeated the pagans and the entire Roman Empire almost overnight was converted to Christianity.



Revelation 13

Revelation 13 then goes on to describe a later development in the Roman Empire. A beast arises out of the sea, once again with seven heads and ten horns (v.1), which relates this beast to Daniel's fourth beast and the dragon in Revelation 12. This beast is "like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth" (v.2). It appears to have a mortal head wound (v.3), but the wound is healed and the dragon gives his authority to the beast (v.4). A mouth is given to the beast (v.5) and it has power to persecute the saints and to blaspheme God for 42 months (vs.5-7).

In the description of this beast we find the prediction of a power to arise that would rule the world and persecute the true believers for 42 months or 1260 days, which again represents 1260 years (see footnote on page 16). This power would speak haughty and blasphemous words against God and his dwelling, and carry out wars against God's saints to conquer them. Since this beast also has seven heads and ten horns (v.1), it must be related to the fourth beast in Daniel 7 and the dragon of Revelation 12, which both refer to the Roman Empire.

2 Thessalonians 2

In 2 Thessalonians 2, the apostle Paul warned all believers that Jesus would not return and the saints would not be gathered to meet Christ until an apostasy developed which would oppose God¹.

¹ According to the word of God the apostasy would develop and the "man of sin" be revealed before the coming of Christ to gather his saints. Paul writes "concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him" (2 Thessalonians 2:1), and then goes on to warn us, "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day (the day of the coming of Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him) will not come **unless** the rebellion (apostasy) **comes first**, and the man of sin is revealed" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Most people today who believe in a "future Antichrist" turn this order around so that they expect the "man of sin" (who they call the "future Antichrist") to be revealed after the coming of Christ. Once again the "future Antichrist" concept leads to a wrong understanding of Biblical passages which in the end will cause Christians to reject the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns.

Paul refers to this apostasy as “the man of sin” and “the son of perdition” (v.3), who would take God’s position by sitting in the temple of God and proclaiming himself to be God (v.4)! This “mystery of iniquity” was **already at work in Paul’s day** (v.7), but it would not be revealed until a later time. When Jesus returns he is to slay and destroy the apostasy so that the Kingdom of God can be established (v.8).

Notice how Paul’s description of “the man of sin” related to certain characteristics of the beast in Daniel and Revelation. All three accounts speak of a power which would arise, related to the Roman Empire, that would appose God and the true believers. This power would continue to exist until Jesus returns to destroy it for ever.

1 & 2 John

The only actual occurrences of the word “antichrist” in the Bible are found in John’s letters.

*“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of **antichrist**, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.” (1 John 4:2-3)*

*“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the **antichrist**.” (2 John 7)*

According to the inspired words of John, **everyone** who does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came “in the flesh” is a member of antichrist! John wrote these words because there were people in his day claiming that Jesus was a spirit who only used a body for 33 years and then discarded the body when he died¹. Tragically, there are still people today who believe and teach that Jesus was a pre-existing spirit who took on a body for his life on earth and then left the body when it was killed. The apostle John says that this is antichrist teaching because it separates Jesus from his body and teaches that Jesus did not really come “in the flesh”, since according to these people, he could exist without the body.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus was born of a human mother, with God as his father (Luke 1:34,35; 2 John 3). Because

¹ William Barclay, *Letters of John and Jude*. (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1970), pp. 5-15; Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1970), p. 1465.

his mother was human, Jesus inherited a nature like ours which can be tempted to sin (Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15), and like everyone since the days of Adam he inherited mortality (Romans 5:12-14). The body of Jesus was exactly like ours and he could no more leave his body than we can leave our own. When the body of Jesus died, Jesus himself died and remained dead for three days (Acts 2:23-32; Matthew 16:21). After that, Jesus (including his body) was resurrected and his body was changed to flesh and spirit instead of flesh and blood (Luke 24:36-43; Acts 2:24,32). Jesus himself said after his resurrection:

"See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have."
(Luke 24:39)

In this way, the Bible explains to us that Jesus Christ did actually come "in the flesh". God warns us in his Word that to separate Jesus from his flesh is deadly wrong, for this is the teaching of antichrist.

Notice how the Bible uses "antichrist" to describe **anyone** who does not teach that Jesus Christ really came "in the flesh". There actually is no such thing in the Bible as one "future Antichrist", because antichrists were already in existence during John's day and many more arose during the following centuries. Antichrists are also in existence NOW since there are many false prophets today who do not teach that Jesus Christ came "in the flesh". Therefore, it is completely unbiblical to speak of one "future Antichrist" and this alone should teach us to beware of the "future Antichrist" theory.

Daniel 9

When the topic of the "future Antichrist" arises, its supporters sometimes refer to the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel 9 for Scriptural proof. However, a close examination of this passage will prove otherwise. In verse 24, six things are mentioned that would be accomplished during the 70 weeks. Notice how all six relate to the work of Jesus Christ. In fact, the fulfillment of each event by Jesus is mentioned by New Testament writers in the following passages:

- 1) To finish the transgression - Matthew 23:32,38.
- 2) To put an end to sin offerings - Hebrews 10:11-14.
- 3) To atone for iniquity - Hebrews 10:1-4,12-14.
- 4) To bring in everlasting righteousness - Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30

5) To seal both vision and prophet - John 6:27.

6) To anoint a Most Holy One - Acts 10:38.

The fact that these six things were accomplished by Jesus should be no surprise because verse 25 of Daniel 9 refers to the coming of "Messiah the Prince" after seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks, or a total of sixty-nine weeks. Here, once again we apply the principle of one day representing one year, as has been previously shown to be done with many time periods in Bible prophecy (see footnote on page 16). The 69 weeks represent 69 "weeks of years" (RSV) or 483 years. These 483 years began in 456 BC with a decree by Artaxerxes to "restore and build Jerusalem" (see Nehemiah 2:1-10), and ended in 27 AD when Jesus Christ began his public ministry and was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism.

During the seventieth week of years, Jesus the Messiah was "cut off" or crucified in 30 AD as verse 26 predicted¹. The Jews were then given a 40 year trial period to see if they would repent of their wicked deeds. As a nation, the Jews still rejected Jesus as their Messiah at the end of 40 years, so God then sent "the people (Roman army) of the Prince (Jesus) that shall come" (v.26) into Jerusalem to "destroy the city and the sanctuary." This occurred in 70 AD when the Roman army entered Jerusalem and destroyed both the city and the temple. The Roman army was referred to as "the people of the Prince" because Jesus used that army in carrying out God's will to humble the Jews for their rejection of the Christ. The parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22:1-14 is in agreement with this principle. In this parable, the King's (God's) marriage feast for his son (Jesus) was made light of by the people (the Jews) and they slew the King's servants (the prophets), so the King "sent forth his armies (the Roman armies), and destroyed those murderers (the Jews) and burned up their city (Jerusalem).

Continuing in Daniel 9 at verse 27, we find that Jesus did

¹ Once it is admitted that the coming Prince in Daniel 9:25 is Jesus Christ, we have no alternative but to accept he is also the Prince who is to come in the next verse (v.26). There is no indication in Daniel's prophecy that he is speaking of two different princes in these two verses so we should accept he is referring to the same person, Jesus Christ. This becomes a problem for those who accept the "future Antichrist" theory because in order to fit this prophecy of Daniel 9 into the "future Antichrist" concept, they must distinguish between the two princes and claim they are two different people. The first Prince is taken to be Jesus and in the very next verse they try to make that Prince to be the "future Antichrist". Once again this is an indication to what extent one must twist and misinterpret Scripture to support the "future Antichrist" theory.

confirm the Abrahamic Covenant¹ during the seventieth week of years, the same in which he was crucified. Sacrifice and oblation were made to cease, because after Jesus' death there was no longer any need to sacrifice for sins. Israel has been desolate since the days the Roman army destroyed the city. Jesus himself said of the Jews before his death:

"Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matthew 23:37-39)

Only recently have we seen the beginning of the consummation as the Jews are establishing themselves in Israel today. Very shortly the desolation will be over and Israel will again turn to Jesus and say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

So when we examine the seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 in detail, we find there is no support, nor any mention of the "future Antichrist" that is so popular in Christianity today. There is also no justification for separating the seventieth week from the previous sixty-nine, and placing its fulfillment at the second coming of Jesus Christ, some 2,000 years after the fulfillment of the first sixty-nine weeks. The "future Antichrist" theory relies heavily upon inserting a 2,000 year gap between the fulfillment of the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, however, the Bible makes no mention of this gap. By reading through the entire ninth chapter of Daniel, it becomes evident that this prophecy of the seventy-weeks was given to the Jews of Daniel's time who were in captivity in Babylon, to encourage them concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of Messiah, both of which happened many centuries ago.

¹ The covenant God made with Abraham that at some future time Abraham, the Christ, and Abraham's descendants would inherit the world (see Genesis 12:3; 13:17; 15:7-15; Acts 7:4,5; Galatians 3:8,17,18; Romans 4:13; Hebrews 11:9). Although God made this covenant with Abraham, it was not ratified until Jesus confirmed it by his death (see Romans 15:8; Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 7:22; 8:6; 9:15-17; 13:20). This is the same covenant God makes with us today through Jesus Christ, for "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3:27-29).

A Summary Of The Characteristics Of The Apostasy

Now that we have looked at the major passages in Scripture that refer to an apostate religious system, let's put all the characteristics together to see if we can identify the great false Church today. Daniel 7, Revelation 12 and 13, 2 Thessalonians 2, and 1 & 2 John all speak of the development of a wicked religious system that would oppose God and the true believers, and teach false doctrines. According to these passages of Scripture, the false religion and its leader will:

- 1) Arise out of the Roman Empire, Daniel's fourth beast (Daniel 7:7-27; Revelation 13:1-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:7).
- 2) Be a world power for 1260 years (Daniel 7:19-25; Revelation 13:7-8).
- 3) Take his seat in the temple of God and proclaim himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).
- 4) Blaspheme God (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 13:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:4).
- 5) Teach that Jesus did not come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-4; 2 John 7).
- 6) Persecute the true believers (Daniel 7:21,25; Revelation 13:7).
- 7) Be overthrown by Christ (Daniel 7:22,26-27; 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

Now we must search for anyone or any religious system that fits this description.

The Identity Of The Apostasy

When we look through the pages of history we find that no religious system fits this description except the Roman Catholic Church with its leader, the Pope. Consider the following evidence:

- 1) The Church rose out of the Roman Empire in 320 AD when the Roman Emperor Constantine became converted to Catholicism and with him, the majority of the Roman world.
- 2) The Church gained support and rose to be a great world

power for 1260 years with its Pope ruling like an emperor, during the years 606-1866 AD.¹

- 3) The leaders of the Church (the Popes) have taken their seat in what they call the "temple of God" (actually St. Peter's in Rome), and proclaimed themselves to be God on earth. The very title "Pope" comes from the Latin word "papa" which means "father"², and Jesus warned us to "call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven." (Matthew 23:9). Thus the Popes and priests have taken upon themselves a title which only God deserves.
- 4) The Popes have not only blasphemed God by allowing themselves to be called "Pope", but have also allowed and encouraged such titles as "our Lord God the Pope"³, "the Holy Father"⁴, and the "Vicar of Christ"⁵ to be used of themselves. The Roman Catholic Priests are also blasphemers of God in that the very name which they like to be called ("Father") is specifically forbidden by Jesus Christ to be used of any man on earth because God is our Father (Matthew 23:9). Furthermore, according to a decree from the Council of Trent, priests are to be "called not only angels, but also God"⁶, which blasphemes the God of heaven all the more!
- 5) The Church has believed and taught for centuries the incarnation of Christ, and that the Son of God had a pre-existence as a spirit. These two doctrines of the Church separate Christ from his body of flesh and their end result is that the Son of God did not come "in the flesh."
- 6) For centuries the Church persecuted, tormented and even killed thousands of the people who would not join. There were times when it tortured and slaughtered anyone found

¹ Robert Fleming, *The Rise and Fall of Rome Papal*, (London: Houlston & Stoneman, Paternoster Row, 1849), pp. 45-46. (First edition printed in 1701). Grattan Guinness, *Light For the Last Days*, (London: Morgan & Scott, 1918), pp. 207-208. E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ* (London: Seeley's, 1851), Vol. IV., pp. 276-280.

² *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, (William Benton, 1971), Vol. II, p. 1765.

³ Canon Law, Extravagans, quoted in F. Walker *et al.*, *Watchman! What of the Night?*, (Bristol: F. Walker, The Dawn, 1942), p. 51

⁴ Henry Halley, *Bible Handbook*, (Chicago, 1956), p. 880.

⁵ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, (Philadelphia, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), p. 127.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

reading the Bible. When men began translating the Bible into the common language of the people, the Church called them heretics and sought to burn or drown them. The pages of history are full of examples of men and women who were persecuted, tortured and even killed by the Church as it made "war on the saints and conquered them."¹

- 7) The Church and its leaders remain to be overthrown by Jesus when he returns. Since Jesus has not returned yet, we cannot look to history for the fulfillment of this event. But we know from the Word of God that the false religious system must be destroyed so that Jesus can replace it with his own system and establish the Kingdom of God.

For a more detailed account of how closely the Roman Catholic Church fits the characteristics in Scripture of the great apostate Church, the reader is encouraged to look into some of the many books available on the history of the papal Church.²

Another Look At Revelation 13

Once we know the identity of the apostate system, we can go back and take another look at Revelation 13 with more understanding. The beast of the sea represents a later development of the Roman Empire after the Dragon of chapter 12. At the end of the fifth century the western section of the Roman Empire began breaking up and was divided into 10 barbaric nations (the 10 horns of v. 1). The seven heads (v.1) represent seven forms of government³ which ruled the empire throughout its existence. The sixth form of government (the sixth head), which was Roman Imperialism, was wounded (v.3) when the Gothic people captured and ruled the empire from about 490-530 AD. This "mortal wound"

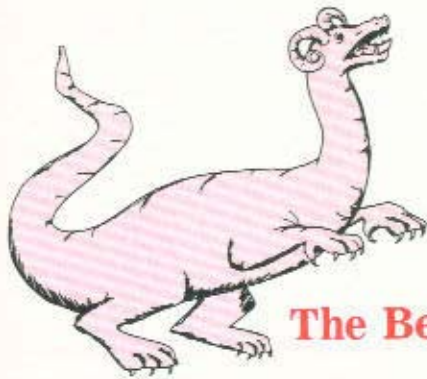
¹ *The Rise and Fall of Rome Papal*, p. 34. Cardinal Lepicier, *The Stability and Progress of Dogma*, (1910), p. 202. *Bible Handbook*, p. 898. Charles Gulston, *No Greater Heritage*, (London: The Paternoster Press, 1960), p. 210.

² Robert Fleming, *The Rise and Fall of Rome Papal*. Henry Halley, *Bible Handbook*. G.H. Pember, *Mystery Babylon the Great*, (London: 1941). Leopold Ranke, *The History of the Popes*, (London: 1853). James Begg, *The Whole Evidence Against the Claims of the Roman Church*, (London: 1855). Joseph Priestly, *A History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, (London, 1871). John Bain, *The Developments of Roman Catholicism*, (London). Albert Close, *The Divine Programme of the World's History*, (London: The Protestant Truth Society, 1916).

³ *Horae Apocalypticae*, Vol. III, pp. 106-107.

was healed when the Goths were overthrown and a Roman Emperor again took the throne. At that time, the military power of the empire (the dragon), which was centered in Constantinople, gave its authority (v.4) to the new Roman Emperor.

The comparison of parts of this beast to a leopard, bear and lion (v.2) indicate that the influences of these previous human empires would be found in this Roman dominion and that it would encompass the geographical areas of the former empires. The mouth which was given to the beast (v.5) represents the Papacy (the line of Popes) which did the official speaking for the empire. By command of the Papacy, the Catholic Church persecuted everyone who would not join, especially those who protested against its false teachings. The Papacy had this authority over the Roman world for 42 months, which is the same period as 1260 days. Using the principle that one day represents one year, the 1260 days equal 1260 years, beginning about 606 AD when the Papacy first received world-political power, until 1866 when it lost that power.



The Beast Of The Earth

Some time about 800 AD, the Roman world underwent a major change when the Holy Roman Empire was formed, and this is depicted in symbol as the beast of the earth (Revelation 13:11). The Holy Roman Empire had two rulers (the two horns), the emperor who ruled the government, and the Pope who ruled the Church. At first they shared the power, but eventually the Papacy took over the political power and the emperor was reduced to a puppet. This take over by the Papacy is represented as "the image of the beast" of the sea because, in effect, the Pope revived the old Roman Imperialism with himself as the emperor. For many years the Pope had control over those who could buy and sell, and he sought the death of anyone who would not worship him. The priests of the Church marked all its members with a cross (the mark of the

beast) on their foreheads, and the priests themselves are marked with a cross on their right hands when they are ordained.

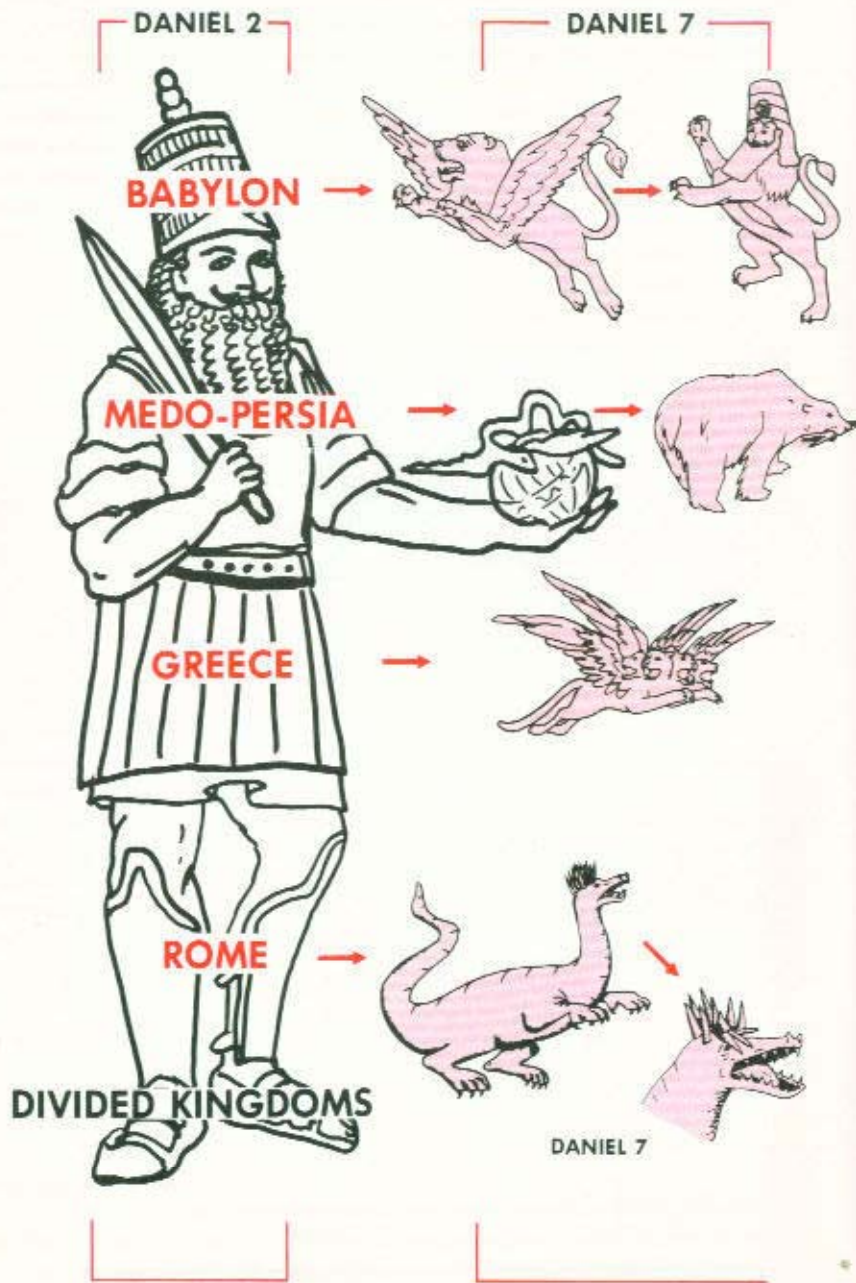
The number 666 corresponds to the numerical value of the Greek word "lateinos" which means "the Latin (man)".¹ This is the word referred to because Latin not only related to the Roman Empire, but has specific reference to the Roman Catholic Church itself. Latin was the common language of the Roman Empire and was later adopted by the Church as its official language for hundreds of years. Therefore, "lateinos" was an appropriate word to describe the Empire in general, and more especially the Roman Catholic Church itself.



Revelation 17

When we come to Revelation 17, we find a later development in the Roman world and the apostate Church. The Catholic Church is represented as a harlot sitting upon a beast which has seven heads and ten horns (vs.1-3). The fulfillment of this prophecy is to be found in our own day, when the territory of the Roman Empire (the beast) is dominated by the Catholic Church (the mother harlot). The false Church is clothed in purple and scarlet, and decorated with all gold jewels and pearls (v.4) showing an outward form of godliness, but missing the "hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (1 Peter 3:4). The woman's title of "Babylon the great" (v.5) further identifies her, because in verse 18 John was told at the time he was given the Revelation, "the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth." At that time there was only one city that had "dominion over the kings of the earth", and that city was ROME, which soon became the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church.

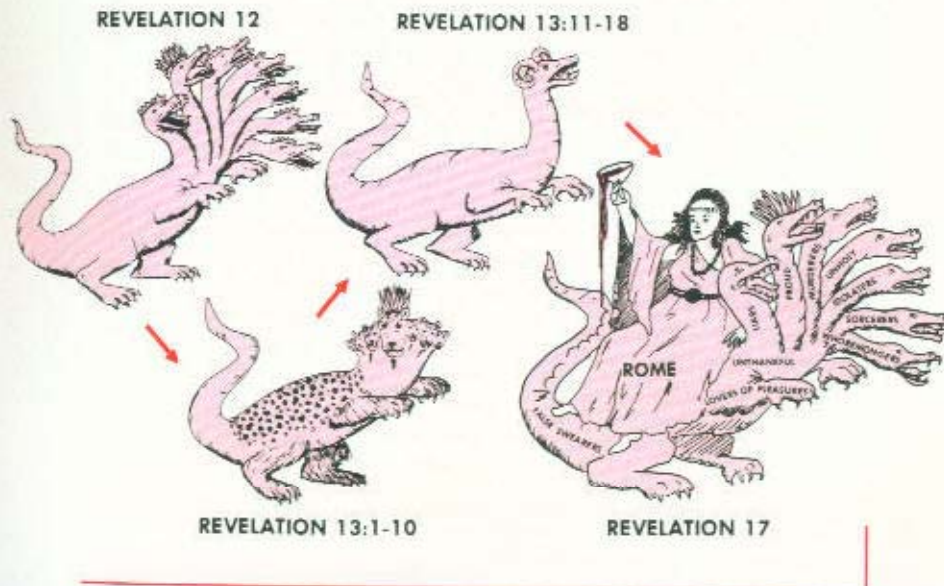
¹*The Rise and Fall of Rome Papal*, pp. 46-47. *Horae Apocalypticæ*, Vol. III, pp. 231-234.



A Summary Of Daniel And Revelation

Now that we have looked at the prophetic picture in Daniel and Revelation we can put all the pieces together in one illustration.

First of all we saw the description of Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 2 showing the four human world empires that would arise in the course of history. Daniel 7 predicted the four empires once again, giving us more detail, especially of the Roman Empire (dragon). When we turned to Revelation 12, we found a description of the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. Revelation 13:1-10 went on to describe a period of years during which the Roman Empire (beast of the sea) would be ruled by 10 barbaric nations. After this, Revelation 13:11-18 predicted the development of the Holy Roman Empire (beast of the earth). Finally, Revelation 17 described the last state of the Roman dominion as being ruled by a harlot church who has many daughters. Thus God revealed this prophetic picture of the political and religious condition of the world from the time of Daniel up to the second coming of Jesus Christ and the setting up of his kingdom.



A Warning To Protestants

In the final vision of the apostate Church in Revelation 17, John was shown not only one harlot church, but an entire family, as is depicted in the phrase "Mother of Harlots" (v.5). This infers that there would be other churches besides the Catholic Mother which would go astray from God. We find the fulfillment of this prophecy in the general movement among Protestant Churches today to turn back to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

During the 16th century, the Protestants broke away from the Catholic Church over disagreements on specific doctrines. Protestant leaders at that time, such as William Tyndale, John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox, and many others, recognized the true identity of the harlot church as revealed in Revelation. They publicly denounced the Papal system which often resulted in the persecution, torture, and even death of these Protestants. Since the Catholic Church was so openly exposed it needed a new interpretation of Revelation which would apply the symbols to someone else, and thereby take the heat off the Papal system.

The first one to come up with the solution was Ribera, a Spanish Jesuit Priest, who published his Apocalyptic Commentary in 1585 AD. Ribera solved the problem by applying the majority of Revelation to a seven year period in the future, just before the second advent of Jesus Christ, during which a "future Antichrist" would rule for 3½ years.¹ This interpretation purposely left the Papal Church out of the picture and allowed Protestants to once again look favorably upon the Catholic system.

At first, the Protestants recognized the error of Ribera's interpretation, but gradually through the years this GREAT DELUSION of a "future Antichrist" begun by Ribera has swept through many Churches. Today we find that Protestants have blindly accepted this "future Antichrist" lie without realizing the background of its origin. They no longer know the true identity of the harlot system, but have drastically changed their beliefs so that they are moving back toward the teachings of the Catholic Church which they originally denounced, and are seeking to become associated again with their Mother. Thus the final state of Christianity before the second coming of Jesus Christ is symbolized as a family of harlots who have gone astray from God and his word.

¹ *The Divine Programme of the World's History*, pp. ii-v., 86,222-224. *Horae Apocalypticæ*, Vol. IV., pp. 464-468.



A Final Appeal To All

The signs of the times today prove beyond any doubt that Jesus Christ will soon return to establish his Father's kingdom. The rebirth of the nation of Israel, the return of the Jews to their land, the military buildup of Russia, the decline in morals of the people, and the many world problems are all pointing to the end of this age. These are exciting days for all Bible students which should cause us to read and study the word of God so that we will know and understand the events related to Christ's second coming and welcome him when he does return.

It is our sincere concern that the "future Antichrist" theory will inevitably cause its supporters to reject Jesus when he comes again. A "strong delusion" has been sent among the people today "to make them believe that is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the Truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). It is our hope that as many as possible can be freed from the "future Antichrist" delusion and then welcome the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ when he comes to rule on earth during the Kingdom of God.

Kenneth and James Styles