

The Eighth Is of the "Seven," Not the "Seventh" (Rev 17:11)

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Introduction

Here I bring together those New Testament passages which contain the word "seven," and those containing the word "seventh." Here we focus specifically on how the above passages are preserved in papyri. The first column below shows where the words are found, the second column lists papyri containing the reference, and the third column shows the page number in Comfort & Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*,¹ where the chapter begins that contains the reference.

The context for the present brief note is that, with or without changing any of the words, scholars sometimes interpret Rev 17:11 as though the eighth power in the series were of the "seventh," rather than the "seven" as the text requires. Another interpretation is that the eighth is "one of the seven," i.e., the seventh, which leads to the same result. ESV translates this phrase correctly: "it belongs to the seven."

The Word "Seven" in New Testament Papyri (Mostly Abbreviated)

Rev. 1:4				
	P18	103	των επτα πνευμα	[not abbreviated]
Rev. 1:11	-			
Rev. 1:12	-			
Rev. 1:16				
	P98	629	αστερες ζ	
Rev. 1:20				
	P98	629	των ζ αστερων	
Rev. 2:1				
	P98	631	τους ζ αστερας	
	P115	665	των ζ λυχνιων	
Rev. 3:1	-			
Rev. 4:5	-			
Rev. 5:1	-			
Rev. 5:5				
	P24	115	-	

¹ All references from Philip W. Comfort & David P. Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts: A Corrected, Enlarged Edition of The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999, 2001).

Rev. 5:6			
	P24	115	τα ζ πνα
Rev. 6:1		-	
Rev. 8:2		-	
Rev. 8:6			
	P115	667	οι ζ αγγελιοι
Rev. 10:3			
	P115	670	αι ζ βρονται
	P47	338	αι βρονται
Rev. 10:4			
	P115	670	αι ζ βρονται
	P47	338	αι ζ βρονται
Rev. 11:13			
	P47	339	χειλιαδες ζ
	P115	670	χιλιαδες ζ
Rev. 12:3			
	P47	342	κεφαλας ζ, ζ διαδηματα
	P115	672	κεφαλας ζ, ζ διαδηματα
Rev. 13:1			
	P115	674	κεφαλας ζ
	P47	344	κεφαλας ζ
Rev. 15:1			
	P115	677	αγγελους ζ, πληγας ζ
	P47	348	αγγελους ε]πτα , πληγας ζ [not abbreviated]
Rev. 15:6			
	P115	677	τας ζ πληη[α]ς
	P47	348	οι ζ αγγελιοι
Rev. 15:7			
	P115	677	-
	P47	348	τοις ζ αγγελοις, ζ φιαλας
Rev. 15:8			
	P47	348	αι ζ πληγαι, τας ζ πληγας
Rev. 16:1			
	P47	349	τοις ζ αγγελοις, τας ζ φιαλας
Rev. 17:1			
	P47	351	των ζ αγγελων, τας ζ φιαλας
Rev. 17:3		-	
Rev. 17:7		-	
Rev. 17:9		-	
Rev. 17:10		-	
Rev. 17:11		-	
Rev. 21:9		-	

The Word "Seventh" in New Testament Papyri (Mostly Not Abbreviated)

Matt. 22:26	-		
John 4:52			
P66	398	εβδομην	
P75	575	εβδομην	
Heb. 4:4			
P13	86	της εβδομης	
P46	228	της εβδομης	
Jude 14			
P72	497	εβδομος	
Rev. 8:1	-		
Rev. 10:7	-		
Rev. 11:15			
P47	339	ο ζ αγγελος	[abbreviated]
P115	670	ο εβδομος αγγελος	
Rev. 16:17			
P47	349	ο] εβδομος	
Rev. 21:20	-		

Discussion

Changing the word "seven"

In all cases but one, when a New Testament scribe in a papyrus source wants to say "seventh" he writes out the word. It is not abbreviated. The one exception (Rev 16:17 [P47]) uses zeta with a superscript line to abbreviate the word. Zeta is the Greek letter/numeral "seven," but it is also occasionally used to abbreviate "seventh."

By contrast with "seventh," which is generally not abbreviated, in almost all surviving New Testament papyri the word for "seven" is abbreviated. Only in Rev 1:4 (των επτα πνευμα, "of the seven spirits" [P18]) and 15:1 (αγγελους ε]πτα, "seven angels" [P47]) is it spelled out. Rev 15:1 is preserved in two papyri. In one of these the word is abbreviated (αγγελους ζ, "seven angels" [P115]), while in the other it is spelled out (αγγελους επτα, "seven angels" [P47, above]).

When an abbreviation is used, the same letter (*zeta*) serves for both terms (*zeta* = "seven," *zeta* = "seventh"). This raises the possibility that no textual distinction is possible between the two terms and, if this is the case, Rev 17:11 can be interpreted either way. The passage reads, "As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth [*kai autos ogdoos estin*] but it belongs to the seven [*kai ek tōn hepta estin*], and it goes to destruction" (ESV).

But in fact it is always possible to distinguish the two terms, because in Rev 17:11 the number term is accompanied by a definite article, which in Greek tells us whether the next word is plural or singular. So changing "seven" to "seventh" in the above passage will involve not only changing *hepta* ("seven") to *hebdomou* ("seventh," genitive singular), but also changing *tōn* (article "the," genitive plural) to *tou* (article "the," genitive singular). In other words, any such change would be radically impossible.

Inserting the word "one"

There is an alternative. If *ek tōn hepta estin* (lit., "it is of the seven") is translated as "it is [one] of the seven," there is a question which one. The first? No, the seventh. This time, instead of changing a word ("seven" > "seventh"), we add a word (> "[one]"). But this second alternative is just as difficult as the first one. The reason for this is that the word "beast" occurs nine times in Rev 17. See table 1.

Table 1
The Nine Occurrences of the Word "Beast"

Seven Heads and Ten Horns	
3	it had seven heads and ten horns
7	the beast with seven heads and ten horns
Was and Is Not	
8	was, and is not , and is about to rise
8	was and is not and is to come
11	was and is not
One Hour	
12	for one hour , together with the beast
Prostitute	
16	will hate the prostitute
Power	
13	power and authority to the beast
17	royal power to the beast

Two examples of the word "beast" occur in isolation. Here we have the "one hour" statement (vs. 12) and the "prostitute" statement (vs. 16). The remaining seven examples occur in groups. Thus, there are three "seven heads and ten horns" statements (vss. 3, 7), three "was and is not" statements (vss. 8a, 8b, 11), and two "power" statements (vss. 13, 17).

Can the statement about the "eighth" ("it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven") be placed in any of these contexts? What vs. 11 says again is, "As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction." So this would fit in two of the above contexts ("seven heads and ten horns," "was and is not"). The first group says: "it had seven heads and ten horns" (vs. 3), and, "the beast with seven heads and ten horns" (vs. 7); and the second group says: "The beast that

you saw was, and is not" (vs. 8a), "the beast . . . was and is not" (vs. 8b), and, "As for the beast that was and is not" (vs. 11). The entire beast had "seven heads and ten horns"; the entire beast "was and is not."

In vs. 11 where the text says, "As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction," syntax requires that the entire beast "is an eighth" ("As for the beast . . . it is an eighth"). There is a distinction between the "dragon" and the "beast," and yet, while the two are not identical, neither are they separate (13:2, 4, 11; 16:13). They are consistently associated with each other. But between the "dragon" and the "serpent" there is no distinction (12:9; 20:2). The only individual who could live long enough to influence all seven heads in turn is "that ancient serpent, who is [called] the devil and Satan" (12:9; 20:2).²

The power that rises in the end time rises *again* in the end time. The fifth head loses its power (#6), and then regains it (#7). Its power is the power to persecute. The parallel for this is the healing of the wounded sea beast (#6 "is not" while it is wounded), which is protected and nurtured during its time of weakness by the earth beast (#6 "is" during the sea beast's wound). The sea beast fully healed is head #7 (after the wound). We must interpret Rev 17 with 13 and 12, and these with Daniel.

Conclusion

If the seventh head comes at the end of the series of heads, it is natural that some would think the eighth also comes at the end of the series. Here I quote Stefanovic, but others have taken a similar position.³

This worldwide political power, which is in the service of Babylon during the final crisis, comes as the "eighth in the sense that he [it] is distinct from the other seven."⁴⁰ Yet it is one of the seven, most likely the seventh one that came after Rome (Rev. 13), the one referred to as the little horn in Daniel 7:21–25 arising out of Rome to make war against the saints.⁴

The above position does not bear sustained scrutiny. The association of "the eighth" is with all seven heads. The seventh head rises in the end time, but the eighth does not. Nor does it matter whether we change a word to isolate #8 to the end time

² Sigve Tonstad quotes George Keough as saying that "the only person who is said to ascend out of the abyss is Satan himself.... The seven heads are his heads.... But the eighth king is the beast himself, and not one of the seven heads" (*Revelation*. Edited by Mikeal C. Parsons, Charles H. Talbert, and Bruce W. Longenecker. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019], 251). "The beast, then, is not one of the seven rulers but is the concentration of all that is evil" (Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, vol. 20, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001], 473).

³ I would prefer not to cite unpublished sources.

⁴ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Spring, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 525; Kindle Edition, 600.

("seven" > "seventh") or add a word to do the same thing (>"[one]," as in "one of the seven"). The effect is the same even though the means are different.

My point is that the associations of "the eighth" are not with one head only, but with all seven. And the activity of "the eighth" is not confined to the end time; its influence is ancient and pervasive. The words *ek tōn hepta estin* mean literally, "it is of the seven." Or we could say, "it belongs to the seven" (ESV).