

Seven Heads and Ten Horns in Daniel and Revelation

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Introduction

When we compare Dan 7 directly with Rev 17 doing so raises questions, but there are intermediate steps that make the transition easier. One point I will make in this brief note is that it is impossible to make any sense of the symbolism of Revelation when divorced from the corresponding symbolism in Daniel. The prophecies unfold gradually. No two are identical, and yet all are comparable. Our starting point for any study of Rev 12, 13, and/or 17 must be Dan 7. Incidentally, this is a topic that Maxwell handles especially well in *God Cares*, vol. 2.¹

Four Beasts/Seven Heads

The four chapters which use the expression "seven heads and ten horns" (or "ten horns and seven heads") form a connected series.

Table 1
Overview

Ref	Heads and Horns	Beasts	Wound	Head	#
Dan 7	Seven heads, ten horns	4	Not mentioned		
Rev 12	Seven heads, ten horns	1	Not mentioned		
Rev 13	Ten horns, seven heads	1	Wound/recovery	Same	
Rev 17	Seven heads, ten horns	1	Wound/recovery	Different	#6

In table 1, each row shows some difference from the others. The first row is simply Dan 7.

In Rev 12 all the same elements originally introduced in Dan 7 are present, but in inverse order. Another difference is that, while the seven heads and ten horns are associated with four beasts in Dan 7, in Rev 12 they are associated with one beast.

In Rev 13 the heads and horns are again associated with one beast, as in Rev 12, but the earlier spelling (7+10 in Rev 12) is reversed (10+7 in Rev 13). And while Rev 12 does not mention any wound, Rev 13 says a wound is inflicted and that it heals.

¹ C. Merwyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985), [pages].***

In Rev 17 we revert to the original 7+10 spelling of the heads and horns, but while in Rev 13 the wound is inflicted and heals without making any distinction of heads (the head that is wounded is the same one that recovers), in Rev 17 the head we start with is #5, when wounded it is #6, and when healed it is #7. We can't make sense of the heads in Rev 17 without reference to Rev 13. The word "wound" is not used in Rev 17; instead what it says is that, at one and the same time, head #6 both "is" and "is not." This takes us back to the relationship between the sea beast and earth beast of Rev 13. When the sea beast is wounded (the "is not" phase of head #6), the earth beast actively protects and nurtures it while it recovers (the "is" phase of head #6). When the recovery of the sea beast is complete, that is head #7 in the later chapter. Head #8 pertains "to the seven" (not to the seventh), which must refer to a power that lasts as long as all seven of the heads in Rev 17 (=all four of the beasts in Dan 7).

Thus, there is a gradual but systematic development of the symbols from Dan 7, to Rev 12, to Rev 13, to Rev 17. There is no single point at which this web of relationships can be broken. Nor is there any way to interpret the latter three chapters apart from Dan 7.

Strength/Weakness/Strength

Returning to Rev 13, there we find a pattern of strength, followed by weakness, followed by renewed strength. The sea beast is at first healthy and able to persecute, then this ability is removed, and finally the wound heals and its ability to persecute returns. This ABA' chiastic pattern is replicated in Rev 17.

In Rev 17, head #1 is Babylon, head #2 is Medo-Persia, head #3 is Greece, and head #4 is Rome. This much is constant across Dan 7, Rev 12, Rev 13, and Rev 17. But whereas the fourth head in Dan 7 encompasses both phases of Rome, in Rev 17 the two phases are systematically distinguished, with the first phase of Rome's power as #4 and the second phase as #5. Another difference in Rev 17 is that the second phase is subdivided into three. Thus, there is the time before the wound (#5), during the wound (#6), and after the wound (#7). The first or secular phase of Rome lasts 360 years (Dan 11:24) and the second or spiritual phase lasts 1260 years/42 months/3.5 times (Dan 7:25; 12:5; Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). It is the case that Rome was a great empire at one time and then a great church/state power. We can't take either fact out of history, nor can we take either fact out of prophecy. Both have their place. Thus, we have #4 (Rome IVa) and everything after that. Here #5 is spiritual Rome before the wound, #6 is spiritual Rome during the wound, and #7 is spiritual Rome after the wound. Head #8 is Satan, who exerts his influence during all seven periods of history.

A Supplemental Note on Dan 11

Already in Daniel we see a hint of the above sequence. Both secular and spiritual Rome are Rome, but spiritual Rome, after a difficult rise to power (11:29-30a), remains

supreme throughout the Middle Ages (11:30b-39). Then, in vs. 40 there is a major Southern attack (*yitnaggah* is singular). This would not have been possible before, because throughout the Middle Ages Rome's power was supreme, so the fact that an attack has become possible in vs. 40 represents a change. Historically that change occurs in 1798. Dan 11:40 gives an overview of what will happen in the remaining verses. In Dan 11:41-43 the king of the North marches Southward, and in Dan 11:44-45 the king of the North retraces his steps toward the North, where he attacks those associated with "the glorious holy mountain," which is not literal Jerusalem.

Moving toward the South means getting into position for a counterattack, but this time not against "the king of the South." The term used in the final verses is "Egypt" – the land of spiritual darkness. Moving back toward the North involves leading the combined forces of North (apostate religion) and South (irreligion) against a common enemy, i.e., the people of God. On his way South the king was purposeful, but on his way back toward the North he is overcome first with fear and then with rage (vs. 44). To determine where we are in the prophecy, we need only ask how angry the king is. If he is not angry yet, we are not in vss. 44-45 yet, which means we are still in the getting ready period described in vss. 41-43.

When Michael stands up, He comes here. It is His appearance in glory with all the holy angels (12:1) that brings the king to his end (11:45). This is unexpected, because in vss. 44-45 he has just finished conquering everything there is to conquer. If so, we should be reading "with none to oppose him," but instead the text says "with none to help him." The reason why no one can help the king at this point is that Michael finally unleashes His power against the usurper and the contest is over before it begins.

Conclusion

The sequence of strength, weakness, and renewed strength (ABA') is important, because it shows that what has been, will be again. We see this in Dan 11:29-39/40-43/44-45 = ABA', and in Rev 13:1-3 (before, during, and after the wound = ABA'), and in 17:8-11 (#5, #6, #7 = strength, weakness, strength = ABA'). All three passages are closely parallel. The three prophecies are not telling us three things; they are telling us one thing three times.

Recall that Dan 7 and Rev 12 do not mention a wound, although Dan 7 does speak of the fourth empire coming in two phases (beast, little horn).² The point the angel is making unfolds gradually. But the point being made in each case is that the temporary weakness of the papacy is just that; it is temporary. It doesn't last. Something else will follow the period of weakness. I could say that we have not yet seen what this will look like, but in fact we have. As the people of God, we saw this for 1260 years, and what we saw then, as it were, we will see again. When the wound is fully and finally healed the king will again act as he acted before. And how did he act before? He persecuted God's

² See http://www.historicism.org/Documents/Dan07_Parallels.pdf.

people. This is what it means for the wound to heal. It means that the power to persecute will return.

The eighth head cannot be a reference to the papacy – restored or otherwise – because it belongs, not to the seventh, but "to the seven" (Rev 17:11). All seven of the heads. Each in turn. Under no interpretation can the papacy have any connection with Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, or secular Rome, because the church grew out of the ashes of the Empire. Without the papacy there would have been no such thing as Western Europe during the Middle Ages, or today. Satan has sought to influence world affairs during all seven periods of history. It "belongs to the seven" (Rev 17:11).

Even more fundamental than the recurring ABA' motif of strength, weakness, strength is our need to study Dan 7, and 11; and Rev 12, and 13, and 17 together. There is one Holy Spirit who has spoken "at many times and in many ways" (Heb 1:1), but always with the same intent. Our only safety as exegetes is to compare what He has inspired people to say there with what He has inspired them to say here. When we hear Him speak with one voice in all the various passages where He addresses a given topic, then and only then can we be sure we have found something good.