

*Fleshy indulgence and pagan government go together*

• *Evil will eventually be exterminated*

• *Seven heads – in John’s day, pagan government meant the government of the Roman Empire*

• *Ten horns – political and military power*

*The beast has a threefold history and an eternal destiny*

• *‘was’ – Nero’s persecution*

• *‘is not’ – Nero died*

• *‘is about to come’ – more persecution*

• *Final destiny is destruction*

*Jesus’ threefold history and eternal destiny*

• *He is and was and is to come*

**Fleshy indulgence and pagan government go together.** Worldly greed is pictured first as a drunken woman riding on an animal<sup>□1</sup>, and then as a woman sitting on seven hills<sup>□2</sup>. John says, *And when I saw this woman, I was very amazed. <sup>7</sup>And the angel said to me, ‘Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of this woman, and the mystery of the beast that carries her, the beast that has seven heads and ten horns. <sup>8</sup>The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, but it will go into destruction.’* The woman rides upon the beast. Fleshy indulgence and pagan government go together. One rides upon the other. The good news is: it will go into destruction. The drunken woman is destined to be defeated and removed altogether. Evil will eventually be exterminated. This is good news for John and for us.

The beast has seven heads. The description is similar to the ‘beast from the sea’ in Revelation 13. We are meant to assume that it is the same creature – representing pagan empires ancient and modern. John is about to tell us that the seven heads stand for seven hills, which we will know is a reference to the famous seven hills on which is built the city of Rome. In John’s day, pagan government meant the government of the Roman Empire. (The seven heads do not stand for seven modern kings! People who try to identify them with modern rulers contradict each other and are soon proved to be mistaken.) Spiritual Babylon is also spiritual Rome. Ancient Babylon and first-century Rome have behind them the same dragon; they are the same ‘woman on a beast’.

The beast has ten horns. They stand for political and military power. (We remember that the ‘ten horns’ of Daniel 7:7 stand for ‘ten kings’, according to Daniel 7:24.) The entire vision speaks of paganism, military power, persecution and control of the economy in the interests of wickedness.

**The beast has a threefold history and an eternal destiny.** There is a phraseology here which must be specially noted: ‘The beast was’. This seems to refer to the fact that the church has known some persecution already. No doubt John is thinking of Nero and the great persecutions that had troubled the church at that time. ‘The beast . . . is not’. Nero died. For a short time the church was left in relative peace. ‘The beast . . . is about to come up out of the abyss’. John expects state persecution to return. The beast will come up out of the abyss to persecute God’s people. Perhaps John specially has in mind the near-the-end time of special opposition for God’s people. ‘The beast . . . will go into destruction.’ The final destiny of such wickedness is extermination. This is what I mean by saying there are three stages in the beast’s history (‘was . . . is not . . . is about to come’) and then there is an eternal destiny. There is some significance in this one, two, three – followed by eternity, and we would do well to give it some thought.

Let us begin with **Revelation 1:4**. There we notice that God is described as ‘him who is and who was and who is to come’. God has a threefold history – past, present and future. God also has an eternal destiny. Two verses later the book of Revelation says, ‘to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever’<sup>□1</sup>.

We have much the same thing in the vision of **Revelation 1:12–18**. Jesus appears to John in his present glory. Yet he says he is ‘the Alpha’; he was there at the beginning. He will be supervising what happens at the end. He is ‘the Omega’. He has a past-present-future history. He is the first and the last<sup>□1</sup> and everything in-between. He is the eternal living One. He is alive for ever and ever. Here is a threefold history, past, present and future, with an eternal destiny.

In **Revelation 2:8**, Jesus has a past. He is ‘the First’. Then Jesus has a point in his story where he ‘is not’. He died. But then he ‘came to life again’. Again there is the same threefold pattern to his story.

□1 17:3b-6a  
□2 17:6b-18

□1 1:6

□1 1:17

In **Revelation 4:8, 9** the four living creatures never stop worshipping God as 'the Lord . . . who was and is and is to come' and as the One 'who lives for ever and ever'.

In **Revelation 11:7–12** there is the same pattern. Two witnesses are given power<sup>□1</sup>. But then 'the beast' kills them<sup>□2</sup> and there is a time of failure<sup>□3</sup>. Then suddenly they are raised to life again<sup>□4</sup>, and are taken to everlasting reward<sup>□5</sup>.

**Revelation 11:15–17** gives the same picture. Christ 'will reign for ever and ever'. God is 'the One who is and who was' and has 'taken great power' and has begun an everlasting reign. The same 'one, two, three – plus eternity' is visible.

But it is not only God who has a threefold history and an eternal destiny. The beast has a threefold history, past, present and future. And he eventually goes to perdition. His career has the same 'one, two, three – plus eternity' structure. In **Revelation 13:3–5**, the beast was present in power. Then there came a time when he 'is not'. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but then the fatal wound was healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. He seemed fatally wounded, but he comes to life again (just as the two witnesses did). People worship the dragon. There is a threefold life-death-resurrection once again.

So this brings us back to **Revelation 17:8**. John is told: 'The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the abyss and go to his destruction.' It follows the exact 'one, two, three – plus an eternal destiny' pattern that we have seen. 'The beast once was, now is not, and yet will come.'

This threefold pattern is important to consider when we ask the question: who will win the great conflict of the ages: Satan or the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer is Satan seems to be alive and well. But then there will be a day when he is utterly defeated. Yet when he seems to have been totally defeated he suddenly revives. But his 'revival' does not last very long. Jesus comes, slays him – and he goes to everlasting destruction in the lake of fire. *'The inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, when they see the beast who was, and who is not, and who is to come'* – but his power will not last for ever.

Satan's story is a back-to-front version of what happens to Jesus. Once Jesus was alive and well in a powerful ministry on planet earth. Then for a few days he seemed to be utterly defeated. Yet when he seemed to have been totally defeated he suddenly was raised from the dead in glorious power. Satan is trying to follow the same pattern. But Jesus will win. When Satan seems strongest Jesus slays him. Satan's destiny is everlasting destruction. Jesus' destiny is the exact opposite. In resurrection power he will reign for evermore.

*The beast and Satan will be defeated*

- *Satan seems to be alive and well*
- *But there will be a day when he is utterly defeated*
- *Satan's story is a back-to-front version of what happens to Jesus*
- *Opposite destinies: Jesus will win but Satan will be destroyed*

- 1 11:3-6
- 2 11:7
- 3 11:8-10
- 4 11:11
- 5 11:12



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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