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THE MEANING OF 666:
AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF REVELATION 13:18

Thesis
presented for the partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Licenciatura en Teología

by

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April, 2014

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Revelation is a book full of symbols and mystery concerning the complete church's history and end time events of the earth. There has been a lot of speculation of what all the symbols and images actually mean. Many are even afraid of reading the book of Revelation, because of all the plagues, beasts, and the great dragon described there. Although at the very beginning of the book, John invites us to read it, "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy" (Rev. 1:3).¹

In this case we are going to embark on a journey to examine and analyze the infamous number of the beast: 666. This number has had hundreds of different interpretations throughout history.

Nevertheless, the following study will focus on a serious exegetical study of the passage of Rev. 13:18. This same verse invites us to be wise and have understanding in order to count the number of the beast.

There have been many interpretations to this verse by various Bible students. Many authors offer many types of methods to interpret this verse. Aune writes, "there are three

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

major approaches to solving the meaning of this obviously symbolic number: (1) gematria, (2) triangular numbers, and (3) the general symbolic significance of numbers in apocalyptic literature”¹

Gematria is the method of approaching the number 666 by counting the value of the letters, it may be Greek, Hebrew or Latin. Summing up the numerical values of names totaling the number 666. Mounce states that, “Gematria was widely used in apocalyptic because of its symbolic and enigmatic quality.” With this method he states that, “The solution most commonly accepted today is that 666 is the numerical equivalent of Nero Caesar.” However there are some problems with this interpretation because, “the name Nero was apparently never suggested by the ancient commentators even though his persecuting zeal made him a model of the Antichrist.”²

The other method of approaching the number 666, is the symbolic method. This method gives the number 6 in 666 a meaning of general evil. If man was created on the sixth day and the number of the beast is a triple 6, therefore this number symbolizes fallen humanity. Applying this inclusive method may incorporate any evil human individual or system to the prophecy of Revelation 13. Mounce continues to explain, “Some writers take the number more as a symbol than a cryptogram. 666 is the number that falls short of perfection in each of its digits.” Finally he just says that 1,800 years of conjecture will give us no answer and writes, “it seems best to conclude that John intended only his intimate associates to be able to decipher the number.” Well, this means that we may never have a definite answer to

¹ David E. Aune, “*Revelation 6-16 v.52b*”, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 770.

² Robert H. Mounce, “*The Book of Revelation*”, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 261, 262.

this numeric mystery. Only if we lived at the time of John and asked him personally we would get our inquired answer.¹

The options that Osborne lists are the following,

(1) the names of various world leaders (the pope, Hitler, Mussolini); (...) (2) chronological, calculating the duration of the Antichrist's reign and linking it with an empire (e.g., Rome, Islam, Nazi Germany); (3) apocalyptic riddles with symbolic significance, like Sib. Or. 1.324-30, in which the name Jesus adds up to 888 (...) (4) a symbol for the Antichrist or anti-Christian powers, in which 666 is an ultimate number for humanity in rebellion against God, (...) (5) a triangular number, specifically the sum of the numbers 1-36 (= 666), with 36 itself the triangular number of the integers 1-8...²

Beale suggests three main interpretations of 666,

(1) From the time of the Roman Empire until the present there have been many attempts to calculate by gematria the number of various world leaders and identify them as the beast. (2) The number is also taken as chronological and as indicating the duration of the beast's reign, whether it be the heathen state, Islam, the Papacy, or some other entity. (3) The number is taken as symbolic for the Antichrist, for antichristian power, or for both.³

In Adventist circles there are two main interpretations: gematria and symbolic interpretation. As an example, Seventh-day Adventist scholar, Ranko Stefanovic states about the phrase: His number is 666: "Since the second century, the most popular method utilized in attempting to decipher the cryptic number of 666 has been the technique known as *gematria*... in which each letter of the Hebrew, Greek, or Latin alphabet has its own numerical value." After mentioning the gematria type of interpretation he offers some examples, "numerous

¹ Mounce, 262.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 519-20.

³ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 718.

conjectures have been made as to the meaning of the number 666. The numerical value may stand for various Roman emperors such as Nero and Caligula, or for others like Muhammad, Napoleon, or Hitler; it may also refer to the inscription of *vicarious filii dei* allegedly inscribed on the papal tiara.”¹ He finds none of these suggestions to be satisfactory. The point I want to emphasize is that even in Adventism there are two main methods that are significant: (1) The symbolic method of interpreting the number 666, which can be an idealist approach, (2) and the gematria method of interpretation, which counts the number of a given name, both historicist and preterist use this method to decipher the name. It is important to add that the futurist school of interpretation teaches that the mark of the beast (666) will literally be imposed on our forehead or right hand, it is a view that dispensationalists take for granted.

Declaration of the Problem

There is not much literature regarding an Adventist point of view, a historicist study, of Revelation 13:18. A need exists for doing an exegetical study of the mentioned verse, in order to understand the meaning of the number 666.

Purpose of the Investigation

In this study we will analyze the number 666 in Rev.13:18 by its immediate and general context, and researching the text in its original language as well as doing an exegetical investigation of the verse in question, in order to have a better understanding of this apocalyptic number.

¹ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the book of Revelation* 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 426.

In this day and age we have seen many religious and spiritual individuals taking the number 666 to extremes. With many explanations of this verse, one who truly wants to understand it may find himself lost in the sea of interpretations. In my experience, even in Adventist circles, they lay this theme aside and don't study it as the same verse commands us to. That is why I decided to inquire on this issue.

Now more than ever, we should look at God's final messages of hope and warning before He comes again in glory. This is truth for the present time we are living in, which makes it worth of study.

Justification

As Kenneth Jorgensen observed, "There is amazingly little textual analysis to be found in Adventist literature regarding Revelation 13:18. There is no known evidence on any historicist doing an exegetical analysis of this text."¹ He points out the gap that needs to be filled, and contributing to fill it is a privilege. The need to find the original purpose of what John meant is crucial for any faithful understanding of a biblical passage. Stefanovic interestingly says, "The context seems to suggest that the original reading had an ability to break the code, which must have later been lost."² We need to find what is being lost and will be lost if we do not have the ability to break the code. Studying the original language and analyzing the connection between the words, may aid the seeker of truth *reveal*, that is, the *revelation* of Jesus Christ.

¹ Kenneth Jørgensen, "An Investigation of 666 & 'Vicarius Filii Dei'", in *Prophetic Principles Crucial Exegetical, Theological, Historical & Practical Insights*, ed. Ron du Preez (Berrien Springs, MI: Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 2007), 304.

² Stefanovic, 426.

CHAPTER II

Overview of Revelation 13:11-18

13:11 - *“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon.”*

Before analyzing this text, the way you interpret this verse will largely depend on how you interpret the next verses also, simply because the “earth beast” occurs in the next verses.

Examining the characteristics of this land beast, we contemplate a combination of a lamb and a dragon. John 1:29 describes Jesus as “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” The identity of the dragon is expounded in Revelation as “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan”. Thus, this beast has Christian features but then speaks as a dragon. We know that horns represent kingdoms (see Daniel 7:24; 8:22). What two kingdoms did Christ identify? Well, Matthew 22:21 states, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”. By comparing this verse with Matthew 4:10; Luke 17:20, 21; John 18:36; Jesus marks a difference between two separate kingdoms. The kingdom of God (the church) and the kingdom of Ceaser (the civil state). Jesus was saying that to Caesar we owe our taxes and to God we owe His tithe. Jesus taught the difference among the church and the state. These two separated lamb horns represent the two separated kingdoms, the church and the state. However, this beast speaks as a dragon, the devil, which will use the state to force the whole world to worship the first beast (Revelation 13:12). Hence, this beast will adopt the appearance of separation of church and state, but

while having these horns separate it will speak as a dragon, forcing the world to worship the beast. The phrase “coming from the earth” represents that this beast will initiate in a place of not many inhabitants. In Revelation 17:15 the waters represent multitudes, and the earth (with barely no water) probably represents an isolated area. Therefore, following the historicist flow of prophecy, this beast raises up from a place of barely any population and after the deadly wound is given to the first beast.

According to Leon Morris, “All in all this beast looks like a dreadful parody of the truth.”¹ He says this because the phrase *two horns like a lamb* makes this beast Christ-like. He also mentions that it is possible to make a contrast between the two horns and the two witnesses (ch.11).

The JFB (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown) commentary says that this land beast is the “false prophet”. Fausset, who wrote the commentary on Revelation, also had many comments that are interesting from a historicist perspective. Some of them are, “*The sacerdotal persecuting power, pagan and Christian; the pagan priesthood making an image of the emperors which they compelled Christians to worship, and working wonders by magic and omens; the Romish priesthood, the inheritors of pagan rites, images, and superstitions, lamb-like in Christian professions, dragon-like in word and act*”² The connection with the book of Daniel is seen, “As the former beast corresponds to the first four beasts of Daniel, so the second beast, or the false prophet, to the little horn starting up among the ten horns of the fourth beast.”³ It is also amazing to see that he suggests the Papacy as an example of the two beasts, “The Papacy’s

¹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 165.

² Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), Re 13:11. Originally published in 1863.

³ Ibid.

claim to the double power, secular and spiritual, is a sample and type of the twofold beast, that *out of the sea*, and that *out of the earth, or bottomless pit*. Antichrist will be the climax, and final form.”¹

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary states the following concerning “out of the earth”, “the nation thus represented would therefore not arise by war, conquest, and occupation, but would develop into greatness in a region of few inhabitants.”² It also declares United States of America as the fulfillment of this verse, “adventist commentators have seen in this second beast a symbol of the United States of America. This power accurately fulfills the specifications of the prophecy. When the first beast was going into captivity in 1798 (see on ch.13:10) the United States was growing into prominence and power. The nation arose, not in the Old World, with its teeming multitudes, but in the New World, with its relatively few inhabitants”³ The two horns represent the separation of church and state, “these may be taken to represent the two notable features of the American system of government, civil and religious liberty, both of which are guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States.”⁴ The following is concerning about the beast that will speak as a dragon, “when the prophecy is applied to the United States it is immediately apparent that fulfillment of the prediction is future. The United States today continues to maintain the principles of freedom guaranteed in

¹ Ibid.

² Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), 7:820.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Nichol, 820.

the Constitution. The manner in which a change in policy will be brought about is outlined in the present prophecy.”¹

13:12 – “*And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*”

This beast evidently has much supremacy in his hand that he can cause all the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast. The first beast was mortally injured but it recovered. Now then the second beast aids the first beast to recuperate its entire authority in the world scenario.

Morris comments briefly on the verse, “He is formidable. He has *all the authority* of his predecessor. But he is in no sense a rival for he makes people worship the first beast.”²

The JFB commentary has a very interesting point of view: “The Church becomes the *harlot*: the world’s political power, the Antichristian *beast*; the world’s wisdom and civilization, *the false prophet*.” Here the commentary makes a difference and interprets the three entities, the harlot, the beast, and the false prophet. It continues to say, “Christ’s three offices are thus perverted: the first beast is the false *kingship*; the harlot, the false *priesthood*; the second beast, the false *prophet*. The beast is the *bodily*, the false prophet the *intellectual*, the harlot the *spiritual* power of Antichristianity” It continues to interpret the prophecy and symbols, “The *Old-Testament Church* stood under the power of the beast, the heathen world power: *the Middle-Ages Church* under that of the harlot: *in modern times* the false prophet predominates. But in the last days all these God-opposed powers which have succeeded each other shall *co-operate*, and raise each other to the most terrible and intense power of their

¹ Ibid., 820.

² Morris, 165.

nature: *the false prophet causes men to worship the beast, and the beast carries the harlot.*”¹

The commentary in this section is citing an author called Karl August *Auberlen* (1824-1864) who was a German Lutheran theologian. This gives us evidence of the Lutheran influence which can be seen by placing Popery as the beast.

The Andrews Study Bible Notes say, “The sea beast is reactivated for final events, but the earth beast, an apparent third player in a false end-time trinity, takes a leading and visible role in its behalf.”² The Adventist Bible Commentary expands on this, “For the second beast to exercise *all* the authority of the first beast, it will have to enter the field of religion, and seek to dominate religious worship. For the United States to take this step will mean a complete reversal of its present policy of granting full freedom of religion to its citizens.” It continues to say in which manner the whole earth will worship the beast, “It is possible, then, to see a specific application here to a civil decree requiring the observance of Sunday, an institution of the papacy, and forbidding observance of the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments. In such a way men would be led to “worship” the “first beast.” They would heed its command above that of God in the matter of the day of worship.”³

13:13 – *“He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.”*

It is astonishing to know that this beast achieves great signs in the sight of men. Examining 2 Thessalonians 2:9 it clearly states that by the *power of Satan* this “lawless one” is able to perform signs and lying wonders. Revelation 16:14 affirms that the dragon, the

¹ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, Re 13:12.

² Dybdahl, 1676.

³ Nichol, 821.

beast, and the false prophet may perform signs to the whole world. It is interesting to note that these signs are the matching signs that Jesus talked about in Matthew 24:24, “For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” It is remarkable to consider that the word for sign used here is the lemma σημεῖα. Searching this word we find it in many verses, nevertheless let’s read Acts 2:22, “Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know.” Therefore, this beast will perform signs and miracles and wonders just as Jesus Christ did while He was at his time on earth. The fire that comes from heaven can be compared to the Elijah experience. (see 1 Kings 18:20-40; 2 Kings 1:10; Solomon experience, 2 Chronicles 7:1). However, Elijah is a true prophet while this earth beast is a false prophet. Whether it is literal fire or a symbolic sign, it is not the current issue, but surely it will perform false miracles.

Talking about the term miracles and signs Morris states, “The term indicates that the miracles are not aimless wonders. They have a deep significance and are part of Satan’s plan (cf. Mark 13:22; 2 Thess. 2:9). An example is the making of *fire to come down from heaven*. This is not said to have destroyed the beast’s enemies or the like. It is apparently simply meant to arouse admiration.”¹

The JFB commentary states examples of signs by fire: the two witnesses (Rev. 11) and the Elijah experience long ago. It states that this beast sign is no children’s game, “Not merely tricks, but miracles of a demoniacal kind, and by demon aid, like those of the Egyptian

¹ Morris, 166.

magicians, shall be wrought, most calculated to deceive; wrought “after the working (*Greek*, ‘energy’) of Satan.”¹

The SDABC comments the purpose of these miracles, “This reveals the agency by which the prince of evil will secure the allegiance of earth’s inhabitants. These miracles will deceive men into believing that the new organization, the image (see on ch.13:14), has the blessing of God resting upon it.”² It also states that the miracles will be made through spiritism, “Seventh-day Adventists expect these miracles to come through the agency of spiritism (see GC 588). Satan, claiming to be God, will seek to support his claim by means of undeniable miracles (see 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; 9T 16).”³

13:14 – *“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth—by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.”*

Morris notes and spiritual lesson in this verse, *“The inhabitants of the earth in this book seems to mean unregenerate mankind (see note on 6:10). The beast can deceive only unbelievers. There is an important spiritual truth here. If anyone serves God with all his heart he will not be taken in by the empty miracles of the deceiver. But one who turns from God predisposes himself to believe the lies of the second beast.”*⁴

¹ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, Re 13:13.

² Nichol, 821.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Morris, 166.

The JFB briefly explains about the dwellers of the earth, “the earthly-minded, but not *the elect*. Even a miracle is not enough to warrant belief in a professed revelation unless that revelation be in harmony with God’s already revealed will.”¹

Talking about the “image to the beast” the Andrews Study Bible says, “A new character in the drama. It functions at the end as a persecutor and an object of worship, the way the sea beast did earlier. This is a strong allusion to the image-worship in Dan. 3.”² The SDABC gives an insight to the word “image”, “Christ is spoken of as the *eikōn* of God. It is the purpose of the plan of salvation to transform man into the *eikōn* of Christ. An *eikōn* implies an archetype and in many respects is like its archetype.”³ It continues to explain what’s going to happen in the end times, “State and church will unite, and the result will be the loss of religious liberty and the persecution of dissenting minorities.”⁴

13:15 - “*He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*”

The one who is going to kill those who do not worship the image of the beast, is the earth beast according to Morris: “Grammatically it is the image which causes the death of the non-worshippers. But perhaps we should understand a change of subject so that it is the second beast who made the image speak and caused the death of those who refused to worship it.”⁵

¹ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, Re 13:14.

² Dybdahl, 1676.

³ Nichol, 821.

⁴ Ibid, 822.

⁵ Morris, 166–167.

Faussett connects this verse with the book of Daniel,

“Nebuchadnezzar set up in Dura a golden *image* to be worshipped, probably of himself; for his dream had been interpreted, “Thou art this head of gold”; the three Hebrews who refused to worship the *image* were cast into a burning furnace. All this typifies the last apostasy.”¹ Referring to the word “speak” it declares interestingly, “Rome’s *speaking* images and winking pictures of the Virgin Mary and the saints are an earnest of the future demoniacal miracles of the false prophet in making the beast’s or Antichrist’s image to speak.”²

The SDABC interpret that the faithful are going to be killed through civil laws, “Legislation in matters of religion has ever been followed by persecution. It was so during the Middle Ages: witness the massacre of the Albigenses, Waldenses, and others—by the civil power, to be sure, but prompted by the dominant church of the day. In its attempt to make all earth’s inhabitants give allegiance to the first beast (see on v.8) second beast will issue a decree threatening with death all who maintain their loyalty to God (see GC 615; PK 605, 606).”³ As it may be noted the author quotes Ellen G. White’s book *The Great Controversy* which is a masterpiece concerning history and future events.

13:16 – “*He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,*”

This beast ensures a world dominion by imposing its mark on human beings. What does it mean to receive the mark on the hand or on the forehead? We need to study scripture with scripture to understand what the Bible says about a precise subject. The forehead represents the mind (Hebrews 10:16) and the hand is a symbol of work (Ecclesiastes 9:10). It is important to note that the sign, or mark, for either God or the beast will be invisible to people.

¹ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, Re 13:15.

² Ibid.

³ Nichol, 822.

Though invisible to men, God will know who has which mark (2 Timothy 2:19). We can also

find in Deuteronomy 6:4-8 an allusion of a sign on the hand or on the forehead:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

Morris states different ways we can look at the mark of the beast and its nature, but at the end he finds no exact interpretation, “The choice of right hand or forehead is presumably for conspicuousness. It could not be hidden. It may also be meant as a travesty of the Jewish custom of wearing phylacteries (little boxes containing extracts from the Bible) on the left hand (or forearm) and on the head. It is probably also a parody of God’s seal (7:3; 14:1). The precise significance of the mark is uncertain.”¹

The significance of the mark of the beast is stated by JFB quoting Augustine, ““I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,” that is, I am His soldier and servant. The mark in the right hand and forehead implies the prostration of *bodily* and *intellectual* powers to the beast’s domination. “In *the forehead* by way of profession; in the *hand* with respect to work and service.”²

The Andrews Study Bible clearly points out the following, “The counterfeit of the seal of God, which the Sabbath command represented (Ex. 20:8–11). At the heart of ancient

¹ Morris, 167.

²Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, Re 13:16.

covenants was a seal containing the name, title, and basis for authority of the covenant maker. The Sabbath command plays that role in the Ten Commandments.”¹

The SDABC also talks about the Sabbath-Sunday controversy; a key to understand the mark of the beast and the seal of God,

“Adventist interpreters understand this mark to be not a literal brand but some sign of allegiance that identifies the bearer as loyal to the power represented by the beast. The controversy at that time will center on the law of God, and particularly on the fourth command (see on ch.14:12). Hence Sunday observance will constitute such a sign, but not until the time when the beast’s power will be revived and Sunday observance in place of Sabbath observance becomes law.”²

13:17 – *“and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*

Those who negate the supremacy of the beast will encounter misfortune. It has such authority that it controls the worldwide finances of the earth. Let us recall that this land beast is the individual that reliefs the first beast to recuperate its lost dominion with the deadly wound.

This has an obvious economical part to it, Morris states, “It points to a total prohibition, which would make it impossible for people without the mark to buy even necessities like food. It is thus impossible for those who oppose the beast even to live.”³

The JFB commentary which we have seen that exemplifies this beast with Catholicism, comments, “The mark may be, as in the case of the sealing of the saints in the forehead, not a visible mark, but symbolical of allegiance. So the sign of the cross in Popery. The Pope’s

¹ Dybdahl, 1676.

² Nichol, 822.

³ Morris, 167.

interdict has often shut out the excommunicate from social and commercial intercourse. Under the final Antichrist this shall come to pass in its most violent form.”¹

The SDABC states a textual importance in this verse. There is an omission of the word “or”. This would mean that, “the phrase “name of the beast” may be considered to be in apposition with the word “mark.” The passage would then read, “the mark, that is, the name of the beast.”² What is the meaning of the text really omits the word “or”? The commentary continues, “This would imply that the mark John saw in vision was the name of the beast. This relationship may be compared with the seal of God placed on the forehead of the saints (ch.7:2), concerning whom John later declared that they had “his Father’s name written in their foreheads” (ch.14:1).”³ However, it continues to say that the word “or” appears in the oldest Greek manuscript,

The word “or,” however, appears in P⁴⁷, the oldest extant Greek manuscript of Revelation, and may well have been in the autograph copy. If so, the phrases, “the mark,” “the name of the beast,” “the number of his name,” being connected by “or,” may indicate degrees of affiliation with the beast or his image. God condemns any degree of association (ch.14:9–11).⁴

13:18 - *“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.”*

We come now to the infamous number of the beast. About the interpretation Morris states that the common answer is Nero Caesar, as most historical critical scholars view it, however he later arguments why this meaning is not consistent,

¹ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, Re 13:17.

² Nichol, 822.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 822–823.

In modern times the most favoured solution is ‘Nero Caesar’ (if the final letter be omitted to give the equivalent of the Latin spelling of the name the total is 616, the variant reading). But to get this result we must use the Greek form of the Latin name, transliterated into Hebrew characters, and with a variant spelling at that (the vowel letter y has to be omitted from *qysr*). This solution has its attractions, but no-one has shown why a Hebrew name with an unusual spelling should be employed in a Greek writing.¹

He continues to say that maybe the number is not an individual that we must necessarily count, but that it is a symbol that signifies falling short. He says this because number 7 is symbol of completeness (as when God completed all creation on the seventh day). Therefore, number 6 is not perfect and is a meaning of the evilness of man (which was created on the seventh day). Nevertheless, at the end he doubts this interpretation by the following and simple fact, “The number may be meant to indicate not an individual, but a persistent falling short. All the more is this likely to be correct if we translate ‘it is the number of man’ rather than ‘a man’.”²

The JFB commentary also declares that Lateinos was a probable answer for Irenaeus. It is interesting to note that the gematria type of interpretation is used by the clear command of the verse to “calculate the number”. It is quite remarkable that it connects the number with Rome, “Irenaeus, in the second century, disciple of Polycarp, John’s disciple, explained this number as contained in the *Greek* letters of *Lateinos* (L being thirty; A, one; T, three hundred; E, five; I, ten; N, fifty; O, seventy; S, two hundred). (...) The last Antichrist may have a close connection with Rome, and so the name *Lateinos* (666) may apply to him.”³ It is essential to quote the primary source to know what three probable options Irenaeus gave:

¹ Morris, 168.

² Ibid.

³ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, Re 13:18.

It is not through a want of names containing the number of that name that I say this, but on account of the fear of God, and zeal for the truth: for the name *Evanthas* (EYANΘΑΣ) contains the required number, but I make no allegation regarding it. Then also *Lateinos* (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: I will not, however, make any boast over this [coincidence]. *Teitan* too, (TEITAN, the first syllable being written with the two Greek vowels ε and ι), among all the names which are found among us, is rather worthy of credit.¹

The Andrews Study Bible simply takes the symbol form of interpretation, “God’s number in Revelation is seven, so multiples of the number six may represent and emphasize counterfeit and falling short”²

The SDABC states an important fact, that the number 666 is a confirmatory sign, in other words, the number 666 is one of the many characteristics or signs which identify the Antichrist, “It should be noted that the beast has already been conclusively identified (see on vs.1–10). The number provides confirmatory evidence of this.”³ The form of interpretation that this commentary adopts is gematria. It is applied to “Vicarius Filii Dei”. It continues, “An interpretation that gained currency in the period following the Reformation was that 666 stood for *Vicarius Filii Dei*, meaning “vicar of the Son of God,” one of the titles for the pope of Rome.”⁴

¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus Against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 559.

² Dybdahl, 1676.

³ Nichol, 823.

⁴ Ibid.

However, when teaching or explaining this interpretation, we must not take it as a dogma for it says, “Inasmuch as this commentary identifies the beast as the papacy, it also accepts this view as being the beast thus far presented, though recognizing that there may be more implied in the cryptogram than this interpretation provides.”¹

¹ Nichol, 823.

CHAPTER III

SCHOOLS OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

Introduction

The cause of the protestant reformation included the incriminating finger of Bible prophecy. The Catholic Church relatively in a short period of time lost thousands of adherents. Many countries embraced the Protestant movement. The evidence was concrete if you read the biblical apocalypse, it pointed only to one religious and political world system. What was needed to be done by the Catholic Church to overturn this hermeneutical method of historicism in order that the accusing finger could deviate from itself to another?

There was a council held in 1545 of the Roman Catholic Church at the Italian city of Trento, to discuss how to halt the Protestant threat. This was the Catholic Church's longest council from 1545 to 1563. The main points were a reaffirmation of the Catholic dogmas and to condemn as an anathema whoever embraced or proclaimed the Protestant cause.

In 1534, St. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus (known as the Jesuits). It not only provided a potent clandestine police force, it also trained elite theological scholars whose foremost resolution was to overthrow Protestantism.

Loyola's Jesuit order soon spawned two able scholars whose writing and influence would contribute to the reversal and arrest of the Protestant Reformation. Where are going to expose their teachings and analyze how they countered the Reformation.¹

Preterism

In this chapter we are going to analyze the concept and method critical scholars now recognize to interpret Bible prophecy. In this case the preterist view will be investigated. Preterism is interpreting the Bible apocalyptic, it may be Daniel or Revelation, to events occurred in the past. This view allocates all prophetic events between the conflict of the Church and Rome in the apostolic age. Original preterism extended beyond the first century to include the entire period of Rome as fulfillment. Dunnet explains that the events in Revelation belong to the first century, in other words, long ago fulfilled. Nevertheless, he mentions it negative aspect, "This view emphasizes the relevance of the book to the churches to which it was written (1:11), but it hardly seems in keeping with the professed forward look of John's message, which specifically presents predictions of things to come (cf. 1:3, 19; 22:18, 19)." ² This interpretation has a total local approach, and no future hope of the things to come. If Jesus said that there exists a blessing to those who read the words of the book of Revelation (1:3), it only applies for our apostolic ancestors for the reason that the book has no relevance for us today. If all signs of the end had their fulfillment on the first century it has no sense of being categorized part of the canon. The *Apologetic Study Bible* states, "The full preterist

¹ Stephen P. Bohr, *Futurism's Incredible Journey* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2009), 38.

² Walter M. Dunnett, *Exploring the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 99.

view, claiming that Christ already came in spirit and power in the judgment of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and that there is no future second advent, is false.”¹

Historical Background

It is interesting to note that preterism is a rather not that ancient method of interpretation. We may observe that this method of interpretation has about 400 years of being originated. A Jesuit scholar by the name of Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613) made a major contribution in the counterreformation attempt to change the historical flow view of biblical prophecy. The reason was to mist of the Roman Papacy in Revelation 13 as Antichrist. Marshall mentions him in his book, “The latter (Luis de Alcazar), in his *Vestigatio Arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi* (1614), maintained that the whole book had been fulfilled: what was yet future in John’s day was accomplished in the downfall of Roman paganism and the consequent triumph of the church.”² Luis de Alcazar was born in Seville, Spain, in 1554. He entered the Society of Jesus (Jesuit) in 1569, preferring a religious life than a entering the Spanish army. After his trip to Rome in 1585, he taught Philosophy and Theology in his native city and in Córdoba for more than 20 years. He died in Seville the 14th of July in 1613.³

It is probable that Alcazar was the first to propose the preterist view on the book of Revelation. However, in the age of third century Christianity, Porphyry, had already applied the preterist interpretation to the book of Daniel. He declared that the little horn of Daniel 7 is

¹ Ted Cabal et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2007), 1912.

² Howard Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 35.

³Gonzalo Diaz Diaz, *Hombres y Documentos de La Filosofía Española: A-B* (Madrid: Instituto de Filosofía Luis Vives, 1980), 135.

representing Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Porphyry declared that the little horn was this Seleucid ruler who governed Syria from 174 until 163 B. C. That is why, “In a sense, therefore, Porphyry and Alcazar became forerunners of the present mode of historico-critical interpretation, which limits the meaning and significance of the biblical apocalypses to the past.”¹

However, Luis de Alcazar took from other contemporary work, “Alcazar (1614 and 1619), drawing on the work of Hentenius (1547), is credited, despite the amount of moral allegorizing in which he engages, with establishing the preterist method of interpretation;”²

Alcazar made a major division on the book of Revelation. This division is also seen on Ribera’s futurist method of interpretation which will be analyzed on the next section. “Like Ribeira he makes a division between Chapters 11 and 12, but argues that 6–11 deal with the conflict between the church and the synagogue while 12–19 are a prophecy, fulfilled by the time he wrote, of the church’s ultimately successful conflict with paganism.”³ Protestants who have continued with this view of prophecy is Hugo Grotius (1644) in order to break the prophetic connection with the Roman Catholic Church. This view was introduced in Britain by Hammond (1653).

¹ William G. Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic”, in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 806.

² Stephen Finamore, *God, Order, and Chaos: René Girard and the Apocalypse* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2009), 25.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

Futurism

This method of interpretation starting with chapter 4 of Revelation, describes all the prophetic events that will take place just before the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. The first 3 chapters may be applied to the first century church (the seven churches). The futurist perspective can be generally understood this way, with a bird view events of prophecy:

1. Lion = Babylon = 605-539 B.C.
2. Bear = Medes & Persians = 539-331 B.C.
3. Leopard = Greece = 331-168 B.C.
4. Dragon = Rome = 168 B.C. – 476 A.D.
5. Gap of over 1500 years.
6. Ten horns (ten nation federation, not yet fulfilled).
7. Little horn (Antichrist, not yet fulfilled).¹

There are many definitions that express what futurism is,

This view holds that, with the exception of chapters 1–3, all the visions in Revelation relate to a period immediately preceding and following the second advent of Christ at the end of the age. The beasts (chs 13, 17) are identified with the future antichrist, who will appear at the last moment in world history and will be defeated by Christ in his second coming to judge the world and to establish his earthly millennial kingdom.²

This view generally interprets the symbols literally, “The events of the Apocalypse from Rev. 4 to the close lie beyond the second advent of Christ. This scheme usually adopts a

¹ Bohr, 7.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 1848.

literal interpretation of Israel, the Temple, and the numbers (the 31 times, 42 months, 1260 days, 3 1/2 years).”¹ With this approach the book is not concerned about the prophet’s own historical context, nor with the later historical events, but it creates a gap until the literal fulfillment just before the coming of Christ. The weakness is that this view totally removes the book of its historical setting, it is difficult to see if it had a meaning to the first century readers.

Historical Background

Knowing the counterreformation theology confronting the Protestant hermeneutic of Bible prophecy, the other able scholar who revived futurism is Francisco Ribera (1537-1591). He was a brilliant student who specialized in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He received a doctorate in theology from the University of Salamanca and joined the Jesuit order in 1570 when he was just 33 years old.² Johnsson adds to his method of interpretation, “Ribera related the first few chapters of the Apocalypse to Rome in John’s own time and applied the remaining chapters to a future three-and-a-half-year reign of an infidel antichrist at the end of the Christian dispensation.”³

Ribera was a brilliant researcher and writer but he was not an outstanding lecturer nor speaker. His life was short as he lived only an early age of 54. Somebody was needed to expound this views, and the right person was named Cardinal Roberto Francesco Romolo Cardinale Bellarmino (1542-1621). He was both a charismatic leader and a Doctor of the Church, a rather rare distinction. He sustained the battle against Protestantism.

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 1:838.

² Bohr, 43.

³ Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic”, 805.

He insisted that the prophecies concerning Antichrist in Daniel, Paul, and John, had no application to the papal power. This formed the third part of his *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei Adversus Huius Temporis Haereticos* [Polemic Lectures Concerning the Disputed Points of Christian Belief Against the Heretics of This Time], published between 1581 and 1593. This was the most detailed apology of the Catholic faith ever produced, and became the arsenal for all future defenders and expositors. It called forth a host of counterwritings from Protestant leaders, who considered him their greatest adversary.¹

Afterwards Protestant theologians began to adopt this method of interpretation, “Subsequent commentators suggest that Ribera was the founder of the modern futurist system of interpretation, which later was developed by writers such as Samuel R. Maitland (1792–1866) and John N. Darby (1800–1882).”²

Scholars on the Origin of Preterism and Futurism

Before continuing on to the next school of interpretation, it would be well to quote various scholars who have traced the resurgence of preterism and futurism to Luis de Alcazar and Francisco Ribera. Let us start with George Eldon Ladd:

It would probably come as a shock to many modern futurists to be told that the first scholar in relatively modern times who returned to the patristic futuristic interpretation was a Spanish Jesuit named Ribera. In 1590 Ribera published a commentary on the Revelation as a counter-interpretation to the prevailing view among Protestants which identified the Papacy with the Antichrist. Ribera applied all of Revelation but the earliest chapters to the end time rather than to the history of the Church. Antichrist would be a single evil person who would be received by the Jews and would rebuild Jerusalem, abolish Christianity, deny Christ, persecute the Church and rule the world for three and a half years.³

Similar thoughts of Joseph Tanner:

So great a hold did the conviction that the Papacy was the Antichrist gain upon the minds of men, that Rome at last saw she must bestir herself, and try, by putting

¹ Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 1:495.

² Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic”, 805.

³ George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 43.

forth other systems of interpretation, to counteract the identification of the Papacy with the Antichrist. Accordingly, towards the close of the century of the Reformation two of her most learned doctors set themselves to the task, each endeavoring by different means to accomplish the same end, namely, that of diverting men's minds from perceiving the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Antichrist in the Papal system. The Jesuit Alcasar devoted himself to bring into prominence the *Preterist* method of interpretation, which we have already briefly noticed, and thus endeavored to show that the prophecies of Antichrist were fulfilled before the Popes ever ruled at Rome, and therefore could not apply to the Papacy. On the other hand the Jesuit Ribera tried to set aside the application of these prophecies to the Papal Power by bringing out the *Futurist* system, which asserts that these prophecies refer properly not to the career of the Papacy, but to that of some future supernatural individual, who is yet to appear, and to continue in power for three and a half years.¹

Richard Kyle concurs:

Among the Jesuits who insisted that the Antichrist was still to come, the approach of the Spaniard Franciscus Ribeira had significant implications for future millennial thought. Both Catholics and Protestants who identified the Antichrist as a contemporary pope or leader generally took a historicist interpretation of John's Revelation. Ribeira reintroduced a somewhat literal futuristic approach to the Apocalypse of John. In doing so he concluded that the Antichrist was a future renegade Jew.²

Historicism

This school of interpretation construes the prophecies with the historical flow of events that are predicted throughout the apocalyptic literature (Daniel and Revelation). It is applied more specifically to the time prophecies that start in the book of Daniel (Daniel 8:14). A helpful concept is the one expressed in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, "This term is used to describe a school of prophetic interpretation that conceives the fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation as covering the historical period from the time of the

¹ Joseph Tanner, *Daniel and the Revelation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 16, 17.

² Richard Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again: A History of the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 62.

prophet to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.”¹ Stefanovic quoted earlier in this study gives us an explanation of this method, “the historical method holds that the book of Revelation provides a symbolic presentation of the prophetic outline of the future course of history from the apostolic times until the time of the end.”²

Although the prophecies are written in cycles and not in lineal form. The visions recapitulate the content of our previous scenario, yet adding a different perspective of the same historical period. For example, Dan. 2, 7, 8-9, and 10-12 are parallel prophecies about the same historical period. In Revelation we can see the same dynamic in the interpretation of the messages of the seven churches the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and Rev. 12-14.

Some biblical examples can be cited of using a historicist method, “Jesus used this method when He interpreted Dan. 9:26, 27 as referring to the future destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Luke 21:20–22). Paul also speaks about a series of successive prophetic events to be fulfilled within history before the second coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2:1–12). Historicism as a method of interpretation is found in the Bible itself, and it provides the key for the interpretation of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation.”³

It can also be seen throughout history the use of the historicist method of interpretation,

The historicist approach to prophetic interpretation was used by the early Church Fathers up to the fifth century A.D. LeRoy E. Froom has shown that a significant shift in prophetic interpretation occurred when Augustine defined the kingdom of God as the Christian church and spiritualized the millennium, making it a symbol of the Christian Era (*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 473–491). His views prevailed during the Middle Ages, until the period of the Protestant reform. The Reformers restored historicism as the method to be used in the interpretation of

¹ “Historicism”, *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Don F. Neufeld ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1996).

² Stefanovic, 12.

³ Neufeld, “Historicism”.

Daniel and Revelation, and identified the papacy as a manifestation of the antichrist predicted in those books.¹

About the Protestant Reformers they unanimously held the view that the papacy was the predicted Antichrist of Bible Prophecy. Before listing the reformer's shared views, there were also Roman Catholic scholars who identified individual popes as the Antichrist. Among these, one of the notables was Arnulf of Orleans (who lived in the late 10th century). Eberhardt, Archbishop of Salzburg (who lived in the first half of the 13th century), wrote about Pope Gregory VII and without equivocation stated that the papal empire was the Antichrist.²

The historical evidence reveals that they shared several theological concepts:

The fourth beast of Daniel 7 is a symbol of the Roman Empire.

The "restrainer" in II Thessalonians 2 is also the Roman Empire.

The Antichrist is not an individual, but rather a succession of popes who, taken together, constitute an apostate religious system.

The time periods in symbolic prophecy are to be understood figuratively, not literally.

The "temple" in which the Antichrist sits is not the literal Jerusalem temple but rather the Christian Church.

The word "Antichrist" does not denote a blasphemous individual who openly denies and defies God but rather one who opposes Christ by posing as the Vicar of Christ.

Though not unanimous, most Protestant reformers believed that the little horn of Daniel 7 represents the Roman Catholic papal system.

The Protestant Reformers frequently remarked that the "Man of Sin," the "little horn," "the beast," "the abomination of desolation," and "the harlot" all represented the Roman Catholic papacy.³

¹ Ibid.

² Bohr, 20.

³ Ibid.

Before concluding this chapter it is relevant to note that by analyzing all methods and letting scripture interpret itself, it is wise to consider Hans K. LaRondelle's counsel,

While we hold the fundamental principle that the Bible is its own expositor, we need to respect interpretations of responsible expositors in the past. Genuine Bible scholars build on the efforts of their predecessors and gratefully acknowledge their achievements and engage critically with them on the basis of a sound exegesis of Scripture. To ignore previous expositions of Scripture would express a spirit of self-exaltation and closed-mindedness. The revelation of God can be comprehended fully only when all the saints share their understandings together (see Eph. 3:18).¹

¹ Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: A Biblical-Contextual Approach*, enlarged ed. (Bradenton, FL: First Impressions, 2007), 345.

CHAPTER IV

EXEGESIS OF REVELATION 13:18

Context

In this chapter we are going to study the context of Revelation 13:18 in light of the biblical data. We are going to start with the immediate context of the group of verses subtitled “The Beast from the Earth”. The subtitle before this one is “The Beast from the Sea” and the one after it is “The Lamb and the 144,000”. This is important to note because chapters 12 and 13 are presenting the three diabolical powers, and in contrast chapter 14 presents the Lamb, the 144,000 standing on the mount, and the three angels’ messages.

There are some observations we may grasp from the reading of the text itself. The important aspects noted are the following: This beast comes from the earth as a combination of a Lamb and a dragon. This beast has authority to make all men worship the first beast (the beast from the sea). The earth beast deceives all people by signs and wonders consequently making them worship the image of the beast. The second beast has a worldwide dominion. It imposes its own mark on the people so that they may buy and sell.

With this aspects the initial idea perceived is that the earth beast raises up as a lamblike creature with a heart of a dragon (Matthew 12:34). Its function is to help the water beast to receive all worship. It deceives all the world with miracles and signs and wonders. Whoever does not worship the beast will certainly be killed. Those who will buy and sell will have the

mark, name, or number of the beast (first beast). At the end of the chapter we notice that its number is 666, which can be calculated by its name, described as a blasphemous name (Revelation 13:1).

Relevance in Context and Argument

The content the passage of Revelation 13:18 adds to the context and argument of chapter 13 is an extra signal or clue of identification of the first beast described. The immediate context suggests that the number of the name applies to the first beast. Beale starts his commentary on the number 666 clarifying it, by saying that in Revelation “15:2 (cf. 20:4) clearly shows that the number is that of the first beast, who is described in 13:1–8, not of the second beast, described in verses 11-16.”¹ The passages that are mentioned connects the beast with *his* image, number of *his* name, and with the mark. We must notice also that the second beast makes an image of the first beast. Therefore, it must be accurate and logical to say that the number of his name is that of the first beast.

Analyzing the complete book of Revelation we see that there are two main parts that we need to consider as we study the prophecies, “the first major part of the book (chaps. 1-14) deals with the era in which the Alpha and Omega is the protector and sustainer of His people in spite of trial and persecution that may come their way. The second major part of the book, beginning with chapter 15, deals with the eschatological judgments that cluster around and center in the consummation of the age: Christ's second advent.”²

¹ Beale, 718.

² Kenneth A. Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation”, in *Symposium on Revelation: Book I*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1992), 30.

According to this, chapter 13 is describing how the people of God will be persecuted and tested with the flames of tribulation. However, in chapter 14, which is part of the first main section of Revelation, we read the 144,000 that stand up with the Lamb victorious over the enemies of truth and justice. This is a great contrast that gives us hope in the mid of fiery attacks from the devil and his angels. There is no better ending to this first main part than trusting that the Lord will be with His people for eternity.

Now we must study the proper context of the book. It is important to know that the date when the book of Revelation was written, according to the majority of scholars, is at the end of Domitian reing (90-95 A.D.)¹

During this time there was a large amount of emperor worship and persecution. For example John was exiled to the isle of Patmos. A Christian named Antipas was killed at Pergamum, although there was no general persecution at that place. The church of Smryna was warned of soon imprisonments that would take place and therefore Christians are motivated to be faithful until the end (death). Another example of persecution is stated, "in 96 ce, a relative of the emperor Domitian, Flavia Domitilla, was banned to an island, because her faith (probably Christian, but possibly Jewish) did not allow her to acknowledge Domitian as a god."²

Content

Analyzing the words in the original Greek gives us a better understanding of all the semantic options that are possible when we are trying to find the right definition in order to translate it.

¹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 948.

² Pheme Perkins and Peter Lampe, "Rome", ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 894.

Key Words to Study

The important words that need more profound insight that will be considered are the following:

1. σοφία (wisdom)
2. ψηφίζω (calculate)
3. ἄνθρωπος (man)
4. ἀριθμός (number)
5. χξζ´ (666)

Human or God's Wisdom?

We are going to start with the word σοφία. It is defined by the capacity to understand and, as a result, to act wisely-‘to be prudent, wisdom.’¹ There are also various definitions that are given according to the context:

1. wisdom, prudence, discretion, *i.e.*, the capacity to understand, and hence act wisely (Col 1:28; 4:5);
2. insight, a more or less formal kind of educational teaching in the ancient world, so, the content of what is regarded as wise (Ac 7:22; 1Co 2:6);
3. specialized knowledge, a skill (1Co 1:17), for another interp, see first entry;
4. Wisdom (title of a book), (Lk 11:49), for another interpretation, see first entry²

In the light of the context of Revelation 13:18 we may conclude that this wisdom is the capacity to understand and when we understand we act accordingly. This word is also used in Revelation 17:9 in which we find numbers playing a role in prophecy. In other words, we need wisdom for the number 666 and we also need wisdom for the seven heads and the eight kings in which one is, and the other has not yet come. We also find wisdom in Revelation 5:12; 7:12

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 383

² James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

where we read that the wisdom is of the Lamb and of God the Father. They have wisdom which we need to understand the number 666 and the eight kings. Analyzing the usage of the word wisdom in Revelation the following is stated,

“The number of the second beast which rises up from the earth (13:11), and which tries to make men on the whole earth worship the first beast (13:15) and bear his mark (13:16), is 666 → I, 462, 16 ff.⁴⁰⁴ To “count” it, i.e., to gather from it the name of the man in view (13:18), special understanding (νοῦς) is needed. The author believes his readers have both this and also true wisdom (σοφία): ὧδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν. 17:9: ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν, is to be understood in the same way. This wisdom is displayed to the reader in the exposition of the vision in 17:8–18. In both cases, then, σοφία is the knowledge which is reserved for Christian confessors and which enables them to perceive the true meaning and ramifications of the events which were taking place on earth in their day.¹

Calculate or Figure Out?

The other word that needs to be examined is ψηφίζω. The definition that is given of this word is the adding up of the letters according to their numerical value in determined language of usage. It could be translated if this was the case “adding up the number of the beast”.²

It interesting to notice that this word may have two meanings according to Swanson, it can be to calculate as stated in the only two verses of the New Testament where we can find this word, Luke 14:28 and Revelation 13:18. The other definition proposed is to figure out, to come to the understanding of, however no verse is mentioned here. It is worthy to note how this word is used in the gospel of Luke, “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it”. This is evidently referring to calculating the cost of the tower, literally counting, adding up the cost to see if he

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 524.

² Louw-Nida, 602.

has enough to even begin the construction of the tower. We can also find another passage of scripture which supports the adding up definition, Acts 19:19 in which the value of the magical books brought are calculated, and the sum is very high. The lemma used here is συμψηφίζω.

Analyzing Revelation 13:18 and the word calculate through the Bible, we see that it is evident that the number of the beast must be counted. In other words we need to put the number 666 in Greek, Hebrew or Latin letters in order to arrive to the solution.¹

“Number” in Revelation 13:18

The other word that needs to be studied is ἀριθμός. This word refers to any cardinal number and a comment made in Louw-Nida’s dictionary indicate that the number 666 was actually derived from the adding up of the numerical values of the letters of a name. As we continue searching we may start to notice that the gematria method of interpretation is conveyed. Although gematria is used by both historicist and preterist, and if preterism is the popular school of interpretation of major historical critical theologians, then it is no wonder that the gematria method is also widely supported. Nevertheless, John the apostle heard numbers in his vision, as recorded in Revelation 9:16 where he heard the number of the army of the horsemen. Why give such an importance to the word number? This word is repeated three times in Revelation 13:18 and one more time in the verse before it. This repetition draws attention to the number that at the end is given and that it should not be passed by.

¹ Kittel, Bromiley, Friedrich, 607.

Number of a Man or Number of Humankind?

A crucial word is ἄνθρωπος. If it is used in the singular sense it is most likely to be referring to a human being (normally an adult). If it is used in the plural it may mean people, persons or even mankind.¹ By comparing the Romans 4:8 with Psalm 32:1-2 we notice an important difference when referring to a man or humankind. We read in Romans 4:8, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” The word translated here is ἀνὴρ. It is self-evident that it is referring to humankind, if not, only men would be blessed by the Lord not imputing sin on him. According to Swanson there are 9 different definitions of the word that can be used in Scripture.

666 or 616?

The number is also important to analyze which is ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ. Louw-Nida states, “This symbolic number would result from the total of the numerical values of the letters of the person’s name.”² It is important to know that this number is not translated hex (6) hex (6) hex (6). It is six hundred and sixty six, this has its hundreds and tens and ones. The reason of mentioning this is because there is a tendency to take the number 6 of 666 as a symbolic number which means incompleteness. It is declared this way because throughout the Bible the number seven is symbolized as the number of perfection. In Genesis 1, God created everything, including the Sabbath in seven days. Therefore, the number 6 is a symbol of human evilness. This way of interpretation ignores the gematria method and opens the sphere of possible candidates for the Antichrist.

¹ Louw-Nida, 103.

² Ibid., 605.

The main issue is the variant reading of the number 666, 616. Many commentators explain that this number is found in minor manuscripts for the reason that the Latin form for Nero (without the final n), adds up to 616. Bruce Metzger comments, “When Greek letters are used as numerals the difference between 666 and 616 is merely a change from ξ to ι (666 = χξξ and 616 = χις). Perhaps the change was intentional, seeing that the Greek form Nero Caesar written in Hebrew characters (נרון קסר) is equivalent to 666, whereas the Latin form Nero Caesar (נרו קסר) is equivalent to 616.”¹

Osborne mentions that the alternative reading of 616, which appears in C Tyconius and other minuscules mentioned by Tischendorf, is also caused because of the Latin form of “Nero Caesar” transliterated into Hebrew which adds up to 616. Osborne mentions some problems with this variant.²

Aune comments about this variant, “One possible origin for 616 as a variant of 666 in the MS tradition is the fact that the Latin form “Nero Caesar” transliterated in Hebrew characters is spelled נרון קסר nrw qsr, the numerical equivalent of which is 616.”³ He gives evidence to this by saying that there was an association of Nero with the beast of Revelation, according to ancient writers that designate Nero as a “beast”. These ancient writers are Philostratus Vit. Apoll. 4.38 and Sib. Or. 5.343; 8.157.⁴

¹ Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 676.

² Osborne, 520.

³ Aune, 770.

⁴ Ibid.

Beale states that many contemporary scholars have tried to identify the number 666 with Nero. This is not possible in the Greek language, however in the transliteration of the Greek into Hebrew of Neron Kaisar, it does add up to 666. He then explains that this could have begun that textual tradition that has the number 616. He then continues, “a copyist may have intentionally changed the number to 616 under influence from the Latin form of the name Nero, which, transcribed into Hebrew characters (nrô qsr), produces 616.”¹ He afterwards continues to list several problems with identifying the number with Nero’s name.

Structure

Having studied the context and content of this verse, now it is time to look at the semantic structure of this verse. It is important to know how each word relate to one another in order to understand what the author meant as he wrote to their contemporary and future readers of the book of Revelation. There are four principle clauses according to “OpenText.org Clauses”. It describes four main ideas throughout this verse. The following are the primary clauses listed.

Understanding the Word Relation²

Ἐνδε ἡ (article) σοφία ἐστίν (present/3rd person/singular). My translation: “Here the wisdom is”. The importance of wisdom to each person that reads it is present from the time John wrote it to the end of times. Wisdom does not limit itself to the process of only understanding, but also to act upon what is understood. It has no merit to be able to know the mysteries of this verse if there is no consequent action and response to the grace of God which

¹ Beale, 719.

² Stanley E. Porter, et al., *The OpenText.org Syntactically Analyzed Greek New Testament: Clause Analysis; OpenText.org Clause Analysis*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006).

gave us wisdom. Here is wisdom is a promise that is ever present with every sincere Bible student who wants to perform God's will. The verb ἐστίν is not in the past tense, then we would never be able to decipher this code. It is not in the future tense, if it were we would be walking by a blind faith and ever anxious to know what the number really meant.

ὁ (article/nominative) ἔχων (verb present) νοῦν ψηφισάτω (imperative) τὸν (article/accusative) ἀριθμὸν τοῦ (genitive) θηρίου. My translation: "the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast". After the reader knows that wisdom is possible at the present time, the next primary clause starts with "the one who has understanding". This is important because the phrase "who has" is also in present tense. After this promise of understanding we have an imperative or a mandate to calculate the number of the beast. It is talking about the first beast of Revelation 13. With this in mind we know it has a name or names of blasphemy. According to the Bible we saw earlier that biblical blasphemy is referring to forgive sins being a human, not God. It is also to declare to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4), while being only a creature. The word ψηφισάτω gives us a command to calculate and count the number of the beast. It is not a simple recommendation or suggestion we can freely ignore.

ἀριθμὸς γὰρ (conjunction) ἀνθρώπου (genitive) ἐστίν. My translation: "for number of a man is". The genitive of the word man "ἀνθρώπου" limits the search for the number from any other thing. In other words we need to calculate the number (which it gives the answer at end 666), in the name of blasphemy (Revelation 13:1), and the number is of a man. Therefore, this man has a name of blasphemy, that when calculated, gives us the result of 666. This is a great clue we need to consider and reflect upon in order to understand the number.

καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ. My translation: “and the number of him six hundred and sixty six”. “And the number of him” uses the word “autou” that is a genitive that constrains and limits the number to the noun that it is representing, that is: man). We have already seen that it does not read as hex hex hex, but as hexakosioi hexekonta hex.

Summary of Exegetical Ideas

Number one, we can obtain wisdom now, as the first readers could. Secondly, we need to calculate (count up) the number of the beast. Thirdly, the number is of a man exclusively. Lastly, the number to be calculated is 666 from the name of the beast.

Some thoughts of the textual study of the best commentaries are summarized:

Osborne commenting on the word “Ὡδε” mentions that this word draws a conclusion from the previous statement. In light of the coming mark of the beast, the readers need “sofia”. We need more “sofia” as we are entering the last days or earth’s history. James 1:5 may also apply here. “Nous” (knowledge) alludes to Daniel 12:10, which refers to the knowledge of the end time prophecies. Now, if John expected first century readers to understand this, it points to a solution centered in the first century rather than in the twentieth century symbolism. Nevertheless, the purpose of the book of Revelation is to “show His servants—things which must shortly take place.” (Revelation 1:1).

Aune comments that Revelation 13:18a is an explanatory redactional addition to the vision of 13:11-17. He notes the parallel between 13:18 and 17:9 concerning the word “understanding”. And also an allusion to Daniel 12:10. Mentioning the word “anthropou” he says it can be viewed in a generic sense or relating to a specific individual, he says that the second view is suggested by the text to be the correct one.

It is interesting to note that Beale found that the name of the number of the beast must not limit itself to Greek or Hebrew. He says this because John did not limit the name as he does in Revelation 9:11, “whose name in Hebrew *is* Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.” and in Revelation 16:16, “the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Method of Prophetic Interpretation

After studying the different schools of interpretation that have developed throughout the history of Christendom, it may be normal to side with or adopt the interpretation most logical to any individual. If the historical flow of events can be seen in the Bible prophecies then we tend to adopt a historicist method of interpretation. If we wonder what the original readers thought when they read Revelation for the first time, and convince ourselves that the major part of Revelation was fulfilled during the reign of Rome, then we adopt a preterist method of interpretation. If we fail to understand a given prophetic passage that deals with things to come, but after some time we come to the conclusion that we cannot understand most of Revelation, then we will probably adopt a futurist method of interpretation for the whole book of Revelation.

Reimar Vetne in his article for the Journal of the Adventist Theological Society titled, “A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation”, proposes that different approaches to the prophecies exists in Daniel and Revelation. In other words that some sections are to be understood with *some aspects* of preterist interpretation. For example the meaning the seven churches had to the readers of the 1st century. Another section with the historicist approach which starts from the book of Daniel, and another section to be read with a futurist approach. He declares this in the context of conversations with non-Adventist interpreters. He continues and declares: “Behind this all-or-nothing logic is an important assumption seldom stated: historicism should be understood to

include the time-periods of preterism (the ancient author's own time) and futurism (eschatological events)."¹

The definition that Vetne gives of Historicism is the following: "Here is my proposed definition of historicism: Historicism reads historical apocalyptic as prophecy intended by its ancient author to reveal information about real, in-history events in the time span between his day and the eschaton."²

With this understood my personal judgment about the number 666 and whether it should be interpreted with a preterist, historicist, or a futurist approach, the convincing interpretation that the text and context suggest is a historicist approach.

Gematria Evidence

As we have seen the practice of calculating the numerical value of words and names is called gematria. Although gematria is the dominant view of critical scholars, it was the standard view among historicist interpretation up until the 1980s. The difference lays in the fact that most historicist link the sea beast to the historic role of prophecy.³

The number is not six six six (hex hex hex), but rather "six hundred and sixty six" (hexakosioi hexekonta hex). There are three main reasons for stating the following: (1) the ancient example of using gematria in relation to 666 is found among the fathers of the church after the time of John. For example, we can name Irenaeus which suggested names by using the gematria methodology. Hippolytus which was a disciple of Irenaeus also followed the

¹ Reimar Vetne, "A Definition and a Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/2 (Fall 2003): 3.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

³ Jorgensen, 303.

gematria method and suggesting names. Victorinus also used the gematria approach to the number 666 and suggested some names on his commentary of the book of Revelation. (2) There are some graffiti left over the ancient and remaining structures of Pompeii which read “I love her whose number is 545” and “the number of her honorable name is 45 (or 1035)”. This is important because there is a close connection in time with the apocalyptic enigma that John wrote. (3) We can also find evidence in the Sibylline Oracle, 1:324-330, which Jesus has a number added up to 888. There has been scholarly agreement that the name Jesus in greek, Iseous, applying a gematria method adds up to 888 which contrasts the number of the beast 666. This confirms that at the time of John it would be normal to use the gematria method to solve riddles and in Revelation 13:18 there is no exception.

Vicarius Filii Dei

The title of Vicarius Filii Dei can be traced back to the year 753. In the forgery known as the Donation of Constantine presumably from the Emperor Constantine to Pope Sylvester I, the title Vicarius Filii Dei occurs. “As the blessed Peter is seen to have been constituted vicar of the son of God on the earth (Vicarius Filii Dei), so the pontiffs who are the representatives of that same chief of the apostles, should obtain from us and our empire the power of a supremacy greater than the clemency of our earthly imperial serenity.” This name fits the characteristic of a blasphemous name and that it counts up to 666 by the Roman numerals. Vicarius Filii Dei is not exactly a name some might say, but when we read Revelation 17:5 and 19:16 we notice that the name may also be a title. Entitling a human being “vicar of the Son of God on the earth” is what the Bible calls blasphemy.

Antichrist Identification Characteristics

We are going to have a brief review of the characteristics of the first beast and then we will have the full panorama to let the Bible speak for itself:

1. The beasts come from the water. Revelation 17:15: the waters represent peoples, tongues and tribes. This beast come from a place where we find many people.
2. The little horn comes from the 4th and terrible beast. So this little horn comes from Rome.
3. From Rome ten kingdoms will arise and after them another little horn will rise up. It rises after the year 476 AD. Daniel 7:24
4. Revelation 13:24, this little horn will rise from the ten kingdoms of Rome. The antichrist will rise in Europe.
5. Daniel 7:25. How much time will this little horn govern? Time, times and half of a time = 3 1/2 years. In bible prophecy one day represents one year. In the Bible each year has 360 days. Revelation 12:6: 1260 days. Revelation 12:14: time, times and half of a time. 3.5 years * 360 days = 1260 days. Revelation 13:5: 42 months * 30 days = 1260 days which equal in prophecies 1260 literal years.
6. Daniel 7:8: this little horn destroys three from the ten kingdoms that rise up.
7. Revelation 13:5; Daniel 7:25: speaks blasphemy against God. Biblical blasphemy see Mark 2:7; John 10:30-33.
8. This little horn made war against the saints and prevailed over them. Daniel 7:25, Revelation 13:7.
9. Revelation 13:3: this power would receive a deadly wound. This deadly wound would need to happen at the end of the 1260 years (1798). The beast would not die, because the Bible says that this wound would heal. In this moment the deadly wound is not completely healed yet.
10. 2 Thessalonians 2:3: the man of sin would fall away. The son of perdition which is also applied to Judas Iscariot. He was part of the 12 apostles. In verse 4 it says he sits at the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. This means that the antichrist will rise in the church.

With this in mind the number 666 may be understood. The first beast of Revelation 13 and the little horn of Daniel 7 is clearly applied to the Roman Catholic Church. The conclusion arrived from studying the context and the text is that the title, *Vicarius Filii Dei* is the best interpretation and name that Revelation 13:18 is referring to.

The importance of studying the totality of Scripture cannot be stressed enough. We must have a humble approach to the text and recognize that the only way to have wisdom and to understand is by the work of the Holy Spirit in each and every one of us. Let us trust in the Lord and anchor in the promise of Revelation 21:5, “then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’”

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