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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

**THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON: THE TIME OF THE FINAL WAR
AND THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALISM
AND POLITICAL POWERS**

A Book-research

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for Post-doctoral Fellowship

by

Vanderlei Dorneles

January 2020

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INTRODUCTION

This book deals with the battle of Armageddon in connection with the fall of Babylon in the literary context of Revelation 16:12-16. Its main focus is about *when* starts the crucial moment of the last battle between Christ and Satan with the involvement of all the powers on earth. The discussion begins from the assumption that since the 1950s a new understanding has been developed that retakes the Adventist pioneers' view according which Armageddon is essentially a spiritual or religious battle. The point in discussion is whether Armageddon will start after or before the sixth plague and when the preparations for it will take place.

This main topic requires to consider many others correlated like literary arrangements of the vision of Armageddon, the meaning of the last plagues, the nature of the battle, who is involved in the confrontation, and so on. The issue of the time of Armageddon is essential to understand the specific meaning of the sixth and seventh plagues and the moment of the fall of Babylon as well as its consequence on the wicked persecuting coalition.

In terms of structure and sequence, the report of Armageddon in Revelation 16:13-16 seems confuse. This makes the task of interpreting this complex text a great challenge. In dealing with Armageddon periscope, the present author proposes that Revelation 16:13-16 may be seen as a parenthetical vision that depicts events which happen before the plagues, as John makes between the sixth and seventh elements in the seals and trumpets' visions. This kind of interlude would be a pattern in these sets of visions. The understanding of this literary arrangement make room for new perspectives to discuss the nature of the battle and the warriors involved in it as well as its moment in history.

According to John the prophet, by the time of the sixth plague, the “water” of the “great river Euphrates” will dry up in order to prepare the way for the “kings from the east.” Then, he saw coming out from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet “three unclean spirits” which make signs to seduce the “kings” of the “whole world” and to gather them together at the place called “Armageddon” (Rev 16:12-16).¹ This is one of the most attractive and well-crafted themes of the book of Revelation. The prophet intertwines in Armageddon account various events, characters, and images from the Old Testament.

Hans K. LaRondelle outlines the Seventh-day Adventist view of Armageddon in four main phases or emphasis through its development in Adventist theology: (1) Since 1844, the last eschatological battle was seen as a final confrontation between the forces of Christ and Satan focused on the Sabbath motif in the context of the last days. (2) From the 1870s onwards, it was interpreted as a political and military war between nations for the domination of Palestine. (3) In the 1900s, it was understood as a secular conflict, centered still on Palestine, but between East and West. And finally, (4) after the 1950s, the view of the pioneers about an eschatological battle focused on the Sabbath and worship issues became current again.²

According to LaRondelle, the understanding of Armageddon as a religious battle was clear for the first pioneers. He says that the most early Seventh-day Adventists, such as James White, maintained the view that Armageddon did not signify a war between nations for political and economic affairs. In contrast, they saw Armageddon as “the final cosmic-

¹ Unless otherwise informed, all Bible references are from NKJV.

² Hans K. LaRondelle, “Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Book II (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 2:435-436.

universal battle between heaven and earth, between Christ and Satan.”³ Although James White had published in 1862 that “the great battle is not between nation and nation, but between earth and heaven,” many other Adventists started to design a political scenario for Armageddon.⁴

The changes in Adventist understanding of Armageddon was influenced by the events in the final half of the 19th century and those of the first part of twentieth century. In the year 1871, after the pope lost his political power (in Italy), Uriah Smith suddenly moved his view on the king of the north in Daniel 11, “from the Papacy to the Turkey.”⁵ This Uriah’s perception unfolded in the understanding of the cosmic conflict in Revelation as well. He understood that “the Euphrates [in Revelation 16:12] symbolizes the Turkish power,” and “the drying up of the river ... would be the consumption of the Turkish empire,” which happened during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.⁶ Then, Armageddon started to be seen as a political war involving nations of the whole world. James White considered that Uriah Smith was “removing the landmarks fully established in the Adventist movement.”⁷

³ Cf. LaRondelle, “Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations,” 438; cf. *Review and Herald*, January 221 (1862): 61.

⁴ Hans K. LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Book II, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 133; cf. *Review and Herald*, January 21 (1862).

⁵ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1950), 4:1116. Uriah Smith first related the Turkey empire to the “king of the north,” of Daniel 11 (see Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation: The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy* [Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1904], 273-276).

⁶ Smith, *Daniel and Revelation*, 648.

⁷ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations,” 438; cf. *Review and Herald*, November 29 (1877).

With the death of Uriah Smith in 1903, it started a third emphasize in Adventist interpretation of Armageddon, with the role W. A. Spicer. He was an influential editor of the *Review and Herald*, later was a General Conference president, and defended the view that “the evil spirits of Revelation 16:13-14 were now speedily gathering all the world to Armageddon (World War I). He stated, ‘Before our very eyes the prophecy is fulfilling’.”⁸

The Adventist geologist George McGrady Price could be the first researcher to publish the view of Armageddon as a conflict over *religious* issues in a denominational magazine (*Sings of the Times*, May 7, 1946) in the twentieth century. However, this more religious view on the last battle, in recalling the original pioneers’ position, did not occupy the most attentions until 1950s. But this happened with the influence of Read’s understanding of biblical prophecies. W. E. Read occupied positions as administrator and researcher. He presented the celebrated lecture called “The Great Controversy,” at the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference in Takoma Park, Maryland.⁹ This event marked a new phrase in Adventist’s view on Armageddon.

In his evaluation, LaRondelle understands that Read restored Christ and his faithful remnant to the “center of a universal Armageddon.” In Read’s view, Armageddon would be in essence the final battle “between truth and error,” “the battle against the saints” by the part of

⁸ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations,” 439; cf. *Review and Herald*, October 22 (1903).

⁹ See W. E. Read, “The Great Controversy,” in *Our Firm Foundation: A Report of the Seventh-day Bible Conference* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 2:237-335. Read came to state that “the battle of the great day of God, otherwise known as Armageddon, takes place during the last plagues; that this conflict is really a war—an overall controversy in which there are several engagements—*against the truth of God*, against the saints of God, of the nations among themselves. The final phase is reached when Christ and his angels ride forth and he has his controversy with the nations” (Read, “The Great Controversy,” 286, italics mine).

the evil world.¹⁰ By quoting many Ellen White's statements, Read made clear that the Sabbath issue is the central point in dispute in the great battle called Armageddon.¹¹ The inclusion of the Sabbath in the last conflict drove the attention to worship and religious issues as the center of the eschatological controversy. According to LaRondelle, "the Christocentric focus of the apocalyptic war against God and his people entered in basic conflict with the old Middle East focus."¹² The conflict would then suddenly end by "the voice of God bringing deliverance to the saints."¹³ The focus was moving from a political and military battle to a religious one. The centrality of Christ ended up blurring the role of God's people and their involvement in this battle.

Although LaRondelle states that the pioneer's view has been reassumed, the focus on the Sabbath does not seem to be so clear especially when one considers the Armageddon's moment in history. Since in general the scholars think that the last battle will be fought after the sixth plague, there is role to the Sabbath if all the people will have decided their destiny when the heavenly ministry had ended.

As a representative work of this context of 1950s, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* highlights that the gathering of the nations (Rev 16:14) and the "preparation for

¹⁰ LaRondelle, "Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations," 440-441; cf. Read, "The Great Controversy," 307-308. LaRondelle says that the "presentation of W. E. Read was mostly a systematic expositions of Ellen G. White's view, not a systematic, exegetical Bible study" (LaRondelle, "Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations," 441).

¹¹ See Read, "The Great Controversy," 260-273. Read stated that "in this final struggle [Armageddon] Satan is bringing to a focus the same hostility to and contempt for the law of God that he has had from the beginning. The law of Jehovah is despised, the Sabbath of the commandments is disregarded, and a false institution is put in its place" (Read, "The Great Controversy," 263).

¹² LaRondelle, "Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues," 148.

¹³ LaRondelle, "Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations," 441.

the battle take place under the sixth plague, but that the battle itself is fought under the seventh plague.”¹⁴ The battle itself begins “when the united religious and political powers of the earth open their final attack on God’s remnant people.”¹⁵ LaRondelle maintains this position. According to him, although the “gathering of the religious and political powers” is pictured within the “framework of the sixth bowl,” it is generally agreed that the battle itself “will take place during the *seventh* plague.”¹⁶ He says that “exegetes have observed that the description of the *sixth* plague—the sudden drying up of the great river Euphrates (v. 12)—merely announces the *preparation* of the political powers for the actual battle of Armageddon.”¹⁷ Accordingly, “the Armageddon clash itself we would therefore expect to occur during the seventh plague.” According to him, the sixth and the seventh plagues are the two consecutive stages in which Armageddon event will take place: “The preliminary drying up of the great river Euphrates and the subsequent fall of Babylon the great.”¹⁸

In this view, the last battle would be a final effort by the part of the evil world to annihilate the people of God or even a military attempt to face Jesus and the angels at the second coming. But what would be the role of the Sabbath and worship issues in this scenario? It should be considered that the moment when Armageddon happens will define its nature in many aspects. The view of Armageddon after the plagues as a final evil effort against the

¹⁴ Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC) (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 7:843.

¹⁵ Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:842.

¹⁶ LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” 135, italics mine.

¹⁷ Hans K. LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1987), 99-100.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

people of God has its main focus on the persecution motif not in the confrontation between the worship to the true God and to the false trinity, and between the everlasting gospel and its falsification by the part of its opponents.

More recent Adventist interpreters maintain in general this view about the time of Armageddon. The final battle will start not *before*, but *after* the first six final plagues. Doukhan says that “the fall of mystical Babylon and the *ensuing* battle paves the way for the final deliverance” of the saints.¹⁹ Paulien sees the fall of Babylon as the end of the last battle. However, he mentions, “The sixth bowl plague itself is not the battle of Armageddon—rather, it is the gathering of the forces for that conflict.” He understands that the battle itself is “outlined in the seventh bowl plague,” described in Revelation 17 through 19.²⁰ Stefanovic argues that Revelation 16:12-16 does not reveal the Armageddon, but “the preparation and great gathering of religious and political powers” for the battle. The confrontation “follows the sixth plague.” Finally, “Christ comes to help his end-time people and deliver them from the oppression of Babylon.”²¹

However, although LaRondelle considers that the drying up of the great Euphrates, as the sixth plague, determines the fall of Babylon, he states that “the battle of Armageddon and

¹⁹ Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 151, 152, italics mine.

²⁰ Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 60. Cf. LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” 148.

²¹ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. 2nd edition (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 503, 499. He adds that “the sixth plague ... portrays the preparation for the coming final battle between Christ and his faithful people and Satan and the worshipers of the beast” (Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 492).

the destruction of universal Babylon, therefore, coincide.”²² Similarly, though Paulien considers that Armageddon would take place after the most of the plagues, he sees it as the “struggle for the mind” of the people before the coming of Christ.²³ Stefanovic does not see differently. He says that “the final battle of Armageddon is not a military battle but a spiritual one—the battle for the minds of the people.”²⁴

However, such a spiritual struggle for the mind of the people requires that, during this last battle, Jesus is performing the intercession before God in order people on earth can make choices and decide what side they are in the eschatological drama.

From another methodological perspective, David Aune addresses the issue almost in the same line. According to him, the sixth plague is “unique in that the *effects* of the pouring out of the sixth bowl are not immediate,” but only a “prelude for the final eschatological struggle.”²⁵ By his turn, Allan Johnson considers that “under the sixth bowl, the kings are only gathered. Not until the seventh bowl do the confrontation and defeat actually occurs.”²⁶

These approaches seem to follow the presupposition that the entire report from chapter 16 through 19 is linear and sequential, not recapitulative or cyclical, or that these chapters comment and expand the last two plagues, not the sixth one specifically. Moreover, these

²² Hans K. LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Book II (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 375.

²³ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 120.

²⁴ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 503.

²⁵ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52b (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 866.

²⁶ Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 551.

recent analyzes indicate that during the sixth plague, under the influence of the “three unclean spirits,” the wicked prepare themselves to fight against Christ and the saints. The climax of Armageddon would be at Parousia, when the ungodly forces will be finally defeated. Overall, the final conflict seems to be critical for the saints until the end, as they are passive in the battle overcome by Christ, although some of recent Adventist interpreters disagree with that passive role of the saints.²⁷

This line of understanding has taken the narrative of Revelation 16:12-21 as a single unity. Textually speaking, John says that the pouring out of the sixth plague makes the Euphrates to dry up. After that, the unclean spirits start their work to gather the kings to fight against God at Armageddon. In sequence, the seventh bowl is poured out with effects in terms of “noises and thunderings and lightning, and ... a great earthquake” as well as “great hail.” In this very moment, God remembers Babylon to give her the cup of his wrath because her sins (v. 19). Then chapters 17 and 18 show the punishment of Babylon, and 19 depicts the final confrontation that would be Armageddon. This sequence seems to indicate that the fall of Babylon would occur *after* the plagues or at the seventh one.

However, in this case, what does mean the drying up of the Euphrates waters at the sixth bowl if not the very fall of Babylon?

Therefore, in order to understand the puzzle here one needs to discern what is the exact effects of the sixth and seventh bowls respectively. And also, it needs to consider if the verses 16:18-21 is the description of very effects of the seventh bowl or it is another textual unity to

²⁷ See Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 495. Paulien emphasizes that “the role of the righteous in the final conflict is to keep spiritually awake and to be always ready.” Moreover, “Armageddon is about the final proclamation of the gospel in the context of great deceptions and persecutions at the end” (Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 120).

introduce the visions of chapters 17 and 18. Moreover, although Revelation 19 portrays a confrontation between “the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies” against Christ and his army (v. 19), it is difficult to see a battle of these evil forces against God after the first six plagues, which will reduce the earth and its inhabitants to a condition of complete desolation.

Some questions emerge regarding this view of a *late* Armageddon, after the sixth plague and in the context of the second coming of Jesus (cf. Rev 19:11-21). First, if the sixth plague predicts a moment of “preparation” and “gathering” of the wicked for the final confrontation, then, instead of punishment during this bowl, the enemies will get to organize themselves to fight against God at Parousia. Besides, what will be the condition of the kings of the earth and the wicked after the fall of Babylon? John indicates that at the climax of the sixth seal, before the coming of Christ (Rev 6:14; 16:20), the “kings of the earth” will be terrified at the point of asking the mountains to cover them before the impending divine judgment. Just after the fall of Babylon, by their own hands, the kings and the inhabitants of the earth will emerge in a deep and desperate mourning (Rev 18:7, 8, 11, 15, 19). Therefore, at this moment the wicked will be terrified, rather than preparing themselves to battle (Rev 6:15; cf. Isa 2:10-12). Finally, if the sixth plague is another “bowl” of God’s wrath (Rev 16:12; Ps 75:8; Jer 25:15), what would be its effects on the condemned world? These questions require a study about what the sixth plague is and when Armageddon really begins.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the nature of the last battle and the time when it will take place. In order to interpret Armageddon according to John’s viewpoint, we have to identify the battles of Israel referred to by the prophet, and discuss how they clarify the understanding of the eschatological battle. Furthermore, we need to delimit the immediate context of Armageddon and its implications. We also discuss the role of the saints and the

condition of the wicked at the final battle. The understanding of the work of the three unclean spirits (Rev 16:13-14) is also considered in relation to the fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev 9:1-21) which have to do with a huge work of deception over the whole world by the part of evil demons as well.

In this perspective, the images of the drying up of Euphrates' waters²⁸ and the "Mountain of Megiddo" imply that the meaning of the sixth plague as well as Armageddon depend on the original texts of this imagery. Furthermore, by looking at the context of the final confrontation, we note that there is a "structural relationship of 'Armageddon' (in Rev 16) with the previous and subsequent chapters."²⁹ Thus, Armageddon is "embedded organically and inseparably within the structural and theological unit of Revelation 12-19."³⁰ In this textual unity it is crucial to consider the work of the demons (Rev 16) and its time as the counterpart of the work of the three angels (Rev 14), as some scholars have highlighted.³¹

The study employs an intertextual approach, according to which we find allusions and echoes of older texts in the text studied, and that usually they enlarge the interpretive context of the topic under discussion. Some authors define intertextuality as the setting of "fragments, images, and echoes" of one text within another.³² It is the creation of one text from another; it is like building one house using the details of the another's project. The ancient rabbis

²⁸ The Euphrates is sometimes called "the river" (Deut. 11:24) and the "great river" (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; Josh. 1:4).

²⁹ LaRondelle, "Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues," 374.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 60, 76, 140; LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 151; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 499-500.

³² Robert B. Sloan & Carey C. Newman, "Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics," in *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 58-59.

considered intertextual exegesis to be based on the idea that “the text contains a mystery communicated by God that is not understood until the solution is made known by an inspired interpreter.”³³ The correct application of the concept strengthens the general principle that the Bible explains itself. Paulien says, “The purpose of [intertextual] allusions is to lead the reader to consider the passage of the Old Testament in question and apply its meaning to Revelation.”³⁴ The intertextual approach takes in consideration the concept of text and the process of its construction and interpretation which requires a look on these notions from the literary theory. The first chapter intends to do that.

In studying Revelation text, we need to apply also the notion of that John’s book has a very complex and artistic literary composition. The use of the practice of recapitulation or cyclical report is very widespread as well as the employment of the called interlude or inserted section. The following chapter intends to present a brief revision of these methodological and theoretical concepts.

³³ Klyne Snodgrass, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in *Interpreting the New Testament*, eds. David Alan Black; David Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 218.

³⁴ Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 139.

CHAPTER 1

INTERTEXTUALITY AND RECAPITULATION IN REVELATION

The purpose of this first chapter is to present a review of the main presuppositions of intertextuality and recapitulation in Revelation. It does that by revisiting the concept of intertext in literary theory and theology in base of works of thinkers like Julia Kristeva and Iuri Lotman, as well as in the thought of theologians like Steve Moyise, Gregory Beale, and Jon Paulien. These notions are essential in entering in Revelation study.

Moreover, in dealing with Revelation of John, one needs to take in consideration the concept of recapitulation or cyclical reports which have to do with issues of structure in this prophetic book. The following pages intends to make a brief review of this literary revelatory device before the very study of the Revelation text in itself. This review is done based on theologians and commentators of Revelation.

Intertextuality in the Literary Theory

The concept of *intertextuality* has reached notoriety from the 1960s, when the term was coined by the Bulgarian philosopher Julia Kristeva. This idea stems, in turn, from the notion of *dialogism* of the Russian philosopher of literature Mikhail Bakhtin. The original idea of dialogism was also further developed by the Russian semiotician Iuri Lotman in the field of cultural studies. Lotman talks about the intersecting texts, which describes the text as a semiotic modeling mechanism interconnected to a network of texts in the space of author's cultural background.

Kristeva's idea of text indicates or presupposes a dialogical relationship between the various texts in culture's world. For her, in this dialogical relationship, the various texts share a given "infrastructure," which cannot be perceived except when the reading of the text is combined with the analysis of their intertexts, that is, the textual material of the author's memory and imaginary. She explains that Bakhtin "situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them." Thus, "history and morality are written and read in the infrastructure of texts."³⁵

At the level of its infrastructure, the text is read as part of a network of texts or as part of the culture that engenders it. In this context, she issues her classic statement of intertextuality, "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."³⁶ The dialogical relationship between texts is not something particular of reading and interpretation. What Kristeva states is that the texts are constructed or they "are born" from intertextual dialogues. In this sense, "dialogism is inherent in language itself." It is essential to the construction of texts and even thoughts.³⁷ We can think and produce texts by the action of memory that we keep through the contact with other texts of culture and with the imaginary itself, which is also a network of texts. This implies that every author, when produces a text, necessarily interweaves languages, fragments, characters, sayings, and figures of diverse texts treasured in his memory. Actually, the meaning of "text" comes from the Latin verb *tecere* which means to "weave." Thus, all texts present themselves

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986; 1969), 36.

³⁶ Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, 37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

as a complex web woven with fragments of earlier texts preserved in memory. On the island of Patmos, John was isolated from the world, but his memory was connected to this very world through a countless number of words, concepts, sayings, phrases, and images with which he dialogues as he writes his prophetic and visionary text.

Kristeva states that, due to the “spatial conception of language’s poetic operation,” it is necessary to define “the three dimensions of the textual space where various semic sets and poetic sequences function.”³⁸ For her, these dimensions are: the “writing subject, addressee and exterior texts.” These three elements are in constant dialogue. She explains that the status of the word can be defined in two central lines: “horizontally (the word in the text belongs both writing subject and addressee.” In this sense, Kristeva states that, “vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus” with which it maintains dialogical relationships.³⁹ Thus, “horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and the vertical axis (text-context) coincide, bringing to light an important: each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read.”⁴⁰ In this perspective, John the revelator writes the divinely received visions to a reading audience familiar with his prophetic thought. However, he is also in direct contact with the literary world around him which models his thoughts and communication.

In turn, Iuri M. Lotman’s greatest contribution to the conceptualization and interpretation of the text phenomenon and the relations among the various texts is the notion that the texts of culture inhabit a semiotic space in which they are organized in an organic and

³⁸ Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, 36.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

dynamic way. He calls this space as “semiosphere.” His view of culture as a set of organically interconnected texts is grounded in biology.⁴¹ With ideas derived from physical and biological settings, Lotman understood all the texts of culture as existing in a kind of physical space, as the living beings. From that, he formulated the concept of semiosphere in 1984 to actually designate the “habitat and life of signs in the cultural universe.” From the notion that the biosphere designates the space of physical life on the planet, according to the formulation of the geochemist Vladimir Ivánovich Vernádski (1863-1945), Lotman viewed the semiosphere as the cultural space inhabited by signs and languages. According to him, this “space” is a “great system” or a “semiotic universe,” consisting of the most diverse signs, texts, and languages of culture.⁴² It is “a set of distinct texts and languages intertwined with one another,”⁴³ following the example of the various forms of physical life in the biosphere environment. In this cultural universe, the texts are in a constant process of crossing and weaving by the function of interlocutors’ memory.

The concept of text for semioticians is quite broad. All set of signs able to produce meaning or communicate information is a text. Thus, archaeological artifacts, rituals,

⁴¹ It is reported that when a young, it was hard to Lotman to decide whether to study biology or philosophy, and at the beginning of his high school studies he had decided on philology (Edna Andrews, *Conversations with Lotman: Cultural Semiotics in Language, Literature, & Cognition* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003], 5). As a Jew, he struggled to enter in a postgraduate program, but reached that at Leningrad State University, where he earned the PhD degree in 1952. Although he fought as a combatant in the Russian war against the Germans for six years, Lotman faced serious political persecution. Andrews states that “until the last three years of his life, his career was dominated by problems related to the Jewish heritage and suspicions about his intellectual agenda” (Andrews, *Conversations with Lotman*, 6). Considering the intertextual nature of biblical text, Lotman’s Jewish origin probably influenced his understanding about the text phenomenon.

⁴² Iuri Lotman, *La Semiosfera: Semiótica de la Cultura e del Texto*, vol. I (Frónesis Cátedra/Universitat de Valencia, 1996), 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

choreographies, mythical narratives, literary works, works of art, film productions, documents, and historical discourses are all “texts of culture.” In the process of producing meaning, these texts incorporate a second language, of a cultural nature.⁴⁴ Therefore, everything that is woven, synthesized, produced by human mind and that deals with the human condition, being able to communicate a message, generate information, and preserve memory, constitutes a text of culture.

The semioticists understand memory as the strategic agent in the process of intertextuality, or crossing texts. Memory is the instance in which ancient texts are preserved and where their semiotic and weaving process is articulated. It is made up of languages and texts. According to Lotman, memory is a dynamic reservoir that conserves, transmits, and generates texts. He conceives culture as “a collective intelligence and a collective memory” in which texts are organized in a certain hierarchy.⁴⁵ In the space of the semiosphere, texts and languages are in a constant process of intersection for the production of new texts, mediated by the memory of culture.⁴⁶

In this line of thought, symbols, phrases, characters, and metaphors in the Apocalyptic texts should be seen as elements that chaining those texts. Revelation, by this perspective, is a mosaic of texts from the culture in which John was inserted. The study of this prophetic text requires to seek and recognize the broad network of texts that it embeds. That is, Revelation is part of a semiosphere of others texts. Discover this textual network is to enter in the very thought and memory of the author. After decades reading, thinking, and preaching from the

⁴⁴ Lotman, *La Semiosfera*, 78.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23, 24.

Old Testament texts, John's memory was a huge reservoir of its images, words, phrases, characters, and narratives. His text is, therefore, produced from this very Old Testament memory.

From a semiotic perspective, reception of the texts by an interlocutor will always be constructive and creative. Reading a text will always result in a new text, because between two consciousnesses or memories the process of communication will always be a kind of translation. However, although a *new text* is produced through the creative contact with other old texts, this new text always maintains information or structures of the primary texts. In doing that, the text preserves the memory of culture.

In this sense, the reproductive process of the texts can only be put into action through the contact between at least two texts, which interact and generate new information. Thus, Lotman states that a text will always be "preceded by another first text, one culture will be preceded by another first culture."⁴⁷ From their contact comes a third text, in a semiotic process. John's Revelation in this sense has to be seen as a creative product of his memory from the interaction between the visions divinely given him and his broad memory.

Lotman was also interested in the study of religions and myths as archetypal formats and narratives that reproduce themselves, contextualized, in the texts of culture. He sees the myths not as a form of primitive cultures, but as texts that remain alive and reproducible in technical and modern cultures. Actually, according to him, the privileged texts for semiotic study are those that play an active role in the mechanism of the semiosphere. The religious and mythical texts are the most exemplary in this regard. Religious texts are not merely communicative supports, but instruments that generate a world model and are organized as

⁴⁷ Lotman, *La Semiosfera*, 90.

language systems. Zalizniák et al state that “the sign systems of religion” have a “maximum modeling capacity” and are considered extremely productive texts for semiotic study.⁴⁸ The book of Revelation must be considered as a strong text of culture in its capacity to form a model of reality and to produce new texts.

Considering the concept of text as a mesh of thought, semioticians conclude that there is no single text, but always a web of interwoven textual surfaces. Kristeva and Lotman indicate a dialogical relationship between the texts, widely understood as a system of codes and signs. Thus, distancing herself from the traditional notions of agency and influence, characteristic of discourse analysis, Kristeva states that the production and reading of texts is only possible when one perceives these processes as an “intersection of textual surfaces.”⁴⁹ Thus, no text is an island, contrary to structuralist theory, and cannot be understood in isolation. From the notion of intertextuality, the text “can only be understood as part of a web or matrix of other texts,”⁵⁰ which makes diachronic analysis a natural undertaking for the text phenomenon.

Throughout this present study on the book of Revelation, this important concept of text and intertexts will frequently be employed but without a direct mention to it. Thus, this concept will be in perspective every time when the author uses the expression “it echoes,” “there is an allusion,” John is “recalling,” or any other reference to the Old Testament text or

⁴⁸ A. A. Zalizniák, et al, “Sobre a possibilidade de um estudo tipológico-estrutural de alguns sistemas modelizantes,” in *Semiótica Russa*, ed. Boris Schnaiderman (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1979), 81.

⁴⁹ Steve Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review,” *Verbum et Ecclesia JRG* 23/2 (2002): 418.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

its background. This means that John's text is been considered from the broad memory behind his prophetic accounts.

Intertextuality and Bible Studies

Since the 1980s, the concept of intertextuality has expanded from its original literary studies to many others fields of scientific studies, including the study of texts of Bible world. From then on, the Holy Scriptures also came to be seen as a network of intertwined texts, inside the canon and also sometimes outside it. Moyise states that the term "intertextuality" was introduced to the study of biblical texts in 1989 and refers to the "complex relationships that exists between texts." One of the first theologians to use the concept of intertextuality in the study of biblical texts, he proposes that no text can be seen as an "island," nor can it be understood in isolation.⁵¹ He states that traditional Bible studies used the primary categories of "prophecy and fulfillment," "type and antitype," and "allegory." However, he says, "Intertextuality opens up a new set of possibilities" in applying the modern concept of text to Bible study.⁵² Moyise postulates that the "task of intertextuality is to explore how the source text continues to speak through the new work and how the new work forces new meanings from the source text."⁵³ This attributes a semiotic dynamism to the text beyond its immediate context, unfolding its senses as a text of culture.

In turn, Jon Paulien states that "the purpose of an [intertextual] allusion is to lead the reader to consider a specific passage of the Old Testament and apply its meaning" to the new

⁵¹ Moyise, "Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review," 418.

⁵² Ibid., 419.

⁵³ Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 111.

text.⁵⁴ He argues that the text attributed to John, in Patmos's exile, is composed of numerous allusions to the Old Testament. In other words, Revelation is crisscrossed with other texts through common figures, expressions, and narratives.

In one of the first works to deal with the issue of intertextuality in the context of Bible studies, Willem S. Vorster argues that the concept of intertextuality differs and challenges important key conceptions of the so-called *Redaktionsgeschichte* ("history of redaction"). According to him, this occurs in three main ways: First, "it is clear that the text phenomenon has been redefined," from a communication between author and recipient to be understood as "a network of references to other texts (intertexts)." Secondly, it is clear that "more attention is to be given to text as a process of production and not to sources and their influences." Finally, it is evident that "the role of the reader is not to be neglected in this approach to the phenomenon of text."⁵⁵

When one comes to intertextuality, the text has no term to indicate that it is referring to another text. There is simply the use of the same language or images already consolidated in culture, in other texts. Thus, the reader must discover in the labyrinths of the text, or in its infrastructure, to use Kristeva's term, the presence and the web formed with others texts through these languages. Thus, intertextuality manifests in the structure of the text, in the characters and their actions, in the plot of the facts, in references to certain objects, finally in literary features and textual unities that establish a dialogue between the various texts. Along the same lines, Gail O'Day defines intertextuality as the way in which a "new text is created

⁵⁴ Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 138-139.

⁵⁵ W. Vorster, "Intertextuality and Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings*, ed. Sipke Draisma (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989), 21.

from metaphors, images, and the symbolic world of an old text or tradition.”⁵⁶ She explains that the interaction between a received text and a new social context “brings a textual and symbolic world to the reading.” Intertextuality, says O’Day, provides hermeneutic lenses by which to read the “new work created in light of the previous one.”

The discussion about the application of the concept of intertextuality in the analysis of biblical texts has highlighted three essential questions: (1) the type of relationship between the new and old texts, whether repetition or reinterpretation; (2) the possibility that the old text loses its meaning when recreated in the new text; and (3) how the biblical authors employed the technique of intertextuality.

In the study of a text, in light of the phenomenon of intertextuality, first of all, it should be noted that the dialogue among texts is not necessarily of repetition or appealing to the authority of old texts. Intertextuality and intersection of texts is neither repetition nor mere dependence, copying, and derivation. When features of a text are found in other texts, there are often complements, rereading, and unfolding. It is a dynamic process of translation, adaptation, and semiosis, in which new meanings and dimensions can take place. Dana N. Fewell deals with the imperial decrees in the book of Esther. She states that we can see “texts claiming authority, granting authority, supporting authority, and wrenching authority away” in relation to other texts.⁵⁷ In this sense, Culler proposes that “the works are made from other

⁵⁶ Gail R. O’Day, “Jeremiah 9:22-23 and I Corinthians 1:26-31—A Study in Intertextuality,” *JBL*, vol. 109, n. 2 (1990): 259.

⁵⁷ Danna Nolan Fewell, “Introduction: writing, reading, and relating,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1992), 12.

works, made possible by the previous works that they retake, repeat, contest, and transform.”⁵⁸ Therefore, instead of simple repetitions, it is verified in the phenomenon of intertextuality that the texts create new texts in a constant reworking. In this line of approach, the crossing of textual surfaces between Revelation and the Old Testament should not be viewed as mere repetition but often as reinterpretation and recreation sometimes. In this sense, Revelation is a book of interpretation of the whole eschatological perspective from the Old Testament imagery. It is a creative and recreative work from Jewish thought to a Christian thought.

Secondly, another important issue in the intertextual approach of the Bible texts has to do with the meaning of previous texts that echoes or are taken up by new texts. The theory of dialogism and intertextuality, based on Bakhtin’s notions, does not nullify the old text in favor of the new ones and vice-versa. In this context, Bakhtin talks about the so-called “bipolarity of the text.” He explains that although, on one hand, there are no pure texts, nor could there be, by other hand “each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique, and unreproducible, and its meaning (its design, the one for which it was created) ever remains.”⁵⁹ This happens because the texts ever refer and report the truth and history. That guarantees both the intertext and the new text independence from each other, which means maintaining its particular reality. Bakhtin adds that this second pole is “inseparable from the author, and does not derive from a random, primary, and natural singularity; it is fully realized through the sign system of the language.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Jonathan Culler, *Teoria Literária: Uma Introdução* (São Paulo: Beca Produções Culturais Ltda, 1999), 40.

⁵⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Estética da Criação Verbal* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1992), 331.

⁶⁰ Bakhtin, *Estética da Criação Verbal*, 331.

In this sense, it comes the synchronic analysis of the text in which its meaning necessarily depends on the specific context of its creation and its author. The words and signs used must be considered in the temporal and punctual setting of the text in question. Thus, the synchronic analysis seeks the historical and contextual meaning of the text. However, the diachronic reading, by seeking the textual network of the text, expands to a broad and deep context, although the meaning is not necessarily another. Thus, the exegesis with its more synchronic perspective should be followed by the intertextual and theological analysis, with its diachronic overview.

A third aspect to consider with regard to intertextuality has to do with the familiarity and application of the principle, although not of the terminology, by biblical authors. Sloan and Newman explain that “biblical or innerbiblical intertextuality is the crushing of fragments, images, and echoes of one text within another one.”⁶¹ For them, biblical authors demonstrated their allegiance to tradition by strategically reshaping their text based on reports from previous authors of the biblical world.⁶² Diop asserts that the incidence of intertextuality in Scripture reveals that biblical authors were endowed with the “science and art of making associations and connections between texts within the setting of the biblical canon.”⁶³ Thus, intertextual relations between biblical authors is not a discovery of contemporary scholars after the 1980s. In fact, this was a predominant way of thinking and conveying religious contents in the

⁶¹ Robert B. Sloan; and Carey C. Newman, “Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, eds. Bruce Corley; Steve W. Lemke; Grant I. Lovejoy, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holmas, 2002), 58.

⁶² Sloan and Newman, “Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics,” 59.

⁶³ Ganoune Diop, “Innerbiblical Interpretation: Reading the Scriptures Intertextually,” in *Understanding Scriptures: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Springs, MI: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 135.

Semitic mindset, as in all other cultures. Diop states that “the way in which Rabbinic Judaism had developed rules (*middot*) for interpreting the Scriptures attests to the importance of innerbiblical interpretation in the setting of the Old Testament.”⁶⁴ He adds that “innerbiblical [or intertextual] interpretation was, therefore, part of the New Testament writers’ religious and cultural environment.”⁶⁵ That is, the rabbis were accustomed to the process of recurring to the sacred texts of their tradition in defending their ideas and interpretations of religious issues.

Along these lines, New Testament writers drew on Old Testament texts when they wrote their own texts. This is the process of building the Scripture that begins with the Law, passes through the Hebrew Prophets, and reaches the New Testament, and finally Revelation. Each one is building over or from another previous ones. In fact, the structure of the Bible (from Torah, Law, to the New Testament) is marked by the feature of intertextuality, and this phenomenon directly influences the hermeneutics of Scripture. The elaboration of Scripture was already a hermeneutic process in which early biblical materials were rewritten to become intelligible and applicable to later situations. In other words, the New Testament authors wrote their texts inserted in the Old Testament semiosphere.

Types of Intertexts Behind Revelation

Paulien explains two main types of intertextuality in the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. According to him, there is the use of texts in an expository and compositional way. Expository use is defined as “a literary strategy in which the Old

⁶⁴ Diop, “Innerbiblical Interpretation...” 137.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Testament text is presented explicitly, with a clear marker.”⁶⁶ In expository use, the biblical text is introduced in order to be interpreted. Compositional use, on the other hand, occurs when biblical elements are intersected in the text without formal external markers. He attests that

The biblical element is subservient to the independent aim and structure of its new context. Genres employing compositional use do not have the same exegetical and rhetorical aims as exposition, but instead create a new and independent text. The biblical material becomes part of the texture of these new works. Typical compositional genres include narratives, psalms, testaments, and wisdom discourses, which use biblical elements for their own patterns, style, and terminology.⁶⁷

Koester states that “by placing older biblical languages in a new literary context, Revelation creates new possibilities of meaning.”⁶⁸ When using prophetic texts in general, “Revelation does not move directly from promise to the fulfillment but includes a transformative aspect.”⁶⁹ On the other hand, Koester points out that “stores from Greco-Roman mythology and legend contribute to Revelation’s intertextual quality.”⁷⁰ However, for him, even in these cases, “the primary template for a passage is biblical, with extrabiblical motifs contributing secondary allusions.” Even so, there are cases when the biblical and extrabiblical elements “are both prominent.” The beast in Revelation 13 and 17 is modeled in

⁶⁶ Jon Paulien, “Dreading the Whirlwind: Intertextuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Springs 2001, vol. 39, n. 1, 2001, 9.

⁶⁷ Paulien, “Dreading the Whirlwind...,” 9.

⁶⁸ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Heaven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 124.

⁶⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, 125. This occurs in relation to certain sections of Ezekiel 37-48, for example.

⁷⁰ Koester, *Revelation*, 126.

part “on the four beasts that rise from the sea in Daniel 7, as well as Leviathan, the sea monster doomed to be destroyed at the end of the age” (cf. Isa 27:1).⁷¹

From the intertextual perspective, the Old Testament writings are essential in interpreting and reading Revelation. Besides, all the ancient writings, including the apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphs, before and after the time of Christ, and all the writings of the cultures with which the people of Israel and Christians were in contact can be useful in interpreting Bible texts. Whether by reading them or simply by being inserted in the same imaginary or semiosphere, those texts can highlight linguistic and semiotic elements in parallel with Biblical texts and shed light on the process of their reading and interpretation.

According to Paulien, Revelation uses at least four basic sources: The Old Testament, Jewish apocalypticism, first-century Greco-Roman culture, and early Christian faith and practice.⁷² “In his desire to communicate with his audience, the author made use of language familiar to his readers regardless of its origin.”⁷³ However, in addition to these, there is the “vision fact,” a “creative element unique to the author himself.” Actually, for him, Revelation is a “piece of literature that is dressed in apocalyptic style yet involves a prophetic self-understanding.”⁷⁴ In other words, John is not a copier of texts and traditions, but a very thinking prophet who desires to interpret and update the prophetic Christian vision through his revelatory book.

⁷¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 126.

⁷² Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 44.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

Although there are many sources behind Revelation, Paulien defends that “the most extensive source for the Apocalypse is the Old Testament” from where John derives and interprets elements of “language, themes, stories, events, personages, laws, and literary structures provide the literary atmosphere in which John breathes.”⁷⁵ Aune states that it is so clear that the author of Revelation was a Palestine Jew who has “an impressive familiarity” with the Old Testament, to which he alludes “more than a hundred times.” Its many allusions indicate “a knowledge of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, while others suggest a familiarity with Greek versions of the Old Testament as well.”⁷⁶ Among the Old Testament texts behind Revelation, Paulien mentions “an ancient Palestinian type by the Samaritan Pentateuch, an Egyptian type exemplified by the Septuagint, and a conservative type which was the forerunner of our present-day Masoretic text.”⁷⁷ The Old Testament is a key both in the writing of the book and its interpretation. The widespread use of the Old Testament language in Revelation does indicate that it is the “major key to unlocking the symbols of the book.”⁷⁸ Although “the author doubtless had visionary experiences, what he wrote is clearly also the product of theological interpretation and reflection.”⁷⁹

Moyise states that previous studies on the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament deal with three types of intertextuality between the two testaments, although they

⁷⁵ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 45.

⁷⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 1.

⁷⁷ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 80.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

did not necessarily employ the concept of intertextuality: quotations, allusions, and echoes.⁸⁰ Quotation usually involves a conscious break of the author's style for introducing words from another context, being announced by the typical phrases: "it is written" and "said Moses," among others. The allusion is "usually woven into the text" also intentionally and is less accurate in verbal terms. The echo is understood as a "faint trace of a text" in another, and may even be unconscious, "emerging from minds soaked in the scriptural heritage of Israel."⁸¹ More technically speaking, Gregory K. Beale proposes that the intertextual allusion should consist of reproducing the Old Testament passage or other writing, in a singular combination of at least "three words," but "it remains possible that fewer than three words or even an idea may be an allusion."⁸²

Differently from allusion, when the author makes conscious reference to a previously available literature or text, the echoes "do not depend on the author's conscious intention."⁸³ The author "picked up an idea that can be found in previous literature, but was probably unaware of the original source." Paulien argues that this such an idea or saying could be "in the air" of the environment in which the author lives. Those ideas were part of "the freely circulated legal tender of a period's mind," it was in the "common domain."⁸⁴ This cultural environment is what Lotman designates as a "semiosphere," a sphere of cultural signs and languages. According to Paulien, the difficulty in identifying allusions to the Old Testament in

⁸⁰ Moyise, "Intertextuality and Biblical Studies...", 419.

⁸¹ Ibid., 419.

⁸² G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 31.

⁸³ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 175.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 172.

Revelation is even more complicated because “John appears on many occasions to have recalled loosely from memory, or adapted the Old Testament language to fit his need, or used a different text tradition than we have available to us.”⁸⁵

Accordingly, Paulien also defends that “there is a virtual unanimity among scholars that the Apocalypse is a Christian reinterpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the events surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁸⁶ Thus, the victory of the exalted Jesus Christ, emphasized in Revelation, “is the new organizing principle of history” in John’s thought. Thus, Revelation of John is full of Old Testament language and imaginary, but it is a very work of the New Testament times, having the victory of Jesus on the cross as its central structure.

However, in his Apocalypse John goes beyond. He did not only use different sources in terms of language but also literary features which increase the beauty and complexity of his artistic work. Krodel affirms that the many intercalations, interludes, cross-references, brackets, and encompassing make so hard the attempt to have a proper outline of Revelation. John indicates the suppose sequence of visions by using simple markers, such as “then, I saw,” “I heard,” or “he said to me,” or yet “after these things I saw” (4:1; 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1), or simply “then.”⁸⁷ These markers not ever help to delimitate a periscope in studying Revelation. But may be the more frequent literary device is what has been called “recapitulation” or cyclical reports.

⁸⁵ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 103.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁸⁷ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation: Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 60.

The Issue of Structure in Revelation

The seven series of visions in Revelation (churches, seals, trumpets, signs, bowls, judgments, and wonders) have led the scholars to a broad discussion about the structure of John's prophetic book. There are different outlines and grouping of these set of visions.⁸⁸ The issue of structure has to do with the hermeneutical method to study the book, and actually it is a very method in itself in interpreting Revelation. The choice in this matter will result in completely different approaches and conclusions.

David Aune defends that one central problem in analyzing the main section of Revelation (from 6:1 to 19:10) is to determine whether the "various sections recapitulate earlier sections" or the author intends to present "a chronological sequence of eschatological events in a manner consistent with a history-of-salvation perspective."⁸⁹ In his own perspective, Aune argues that "no form of recapitulation is valid for the present text of Revelation." However, this does not mean that "many of the constituent visions and traditions used as sources by the author could not have referred to essentially the same eschatological events from different perspectives and used variegated imagery."⁹⁰ Robert H. Mounce also

⁸⁸ Stefanovic says that "a number of repetitive structures in Revelation fall into groups of seven: the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls plagues. A critical problem for the interpreters of Revelation is whether these septenaries should be understood as parallel or recapitulatory accounts of the same events, or as a continuous or progressive chronological sequence of end-time events in which the trumpets follow the seals and the bowls plagues follow the trumpets" (Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 28).

⁸⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*. Word Biblical Commentary 52a (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), xci.

⁹⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xciii.

rejects a “predetermined theory of recapitulation,” though he does not deny that certain sections “seem to go together.”⁹¹

By his turn, Michaels insists that the end of Revelation 6 raises the significant question about the structure of Revelation: “Is John’s vision of the opening of the sixth seal truly a picture of the end of the world, or of something that will happen before it?” If it is the end of the world, “then at least some of what follows in chapters 7-21 must be regarded as a flashback or reiteration of events preceding the end.” According to him, this vision of the end in the sixth seal indicate “that John’s visions are not to be taken as continuous or in chronological sequence.”⁹²

Elizabeth S. Fiorenza also works in this line. She understands that “by integrating the plague septets into the narrative structure, the author combines a cyclical form of repetition with end-oriented movement of the whole book.” According to her, “since the three plague septets [seals, trumpets, and bowls] do not simply repeat each other but evolve from and expand each other, they are open cycles.” Her notion on “open cycles” could be more precise in technical terms than “recapitulation” which means “to summarize or review the topics at the end of a discussion or speech.” She says that “the narrative movement of the seven-sealed scroll is therefore best diagrammed as a conical spiral moving from the vision of the Lamb’s enthronement as the eschatological ruler to that of Parousia, Christ’s coming.”⁹³ Thus, the

⁹¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 32.

⁹² J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 54.

⁹³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis, MN: Fort Press, 1998), 171.

subsequent sections do not exactly “review and summarize” the previous ones, but indeed reopen them from another perspectives. Krodel adds that “the day of judgment (6:16-17) as well as the final salvation (11:15-18) is present before the first bowl of wrath is poured out in 16:2.” For him, before that, the sequence of the three septets cannot possibly constitute a chronological sequence.” Recapitulation, according to him, may not be understood as “mere repetition,” but the subsequent cycle “intensify aspects of earlier ones, or refocus them.”⁹⁴

May be one of the first modern Revelation scholars to defend the principle of recapitulation was Austin Farrer. He published his *A Rebirth of Image: The Making of St. John Apocalypse* in 1949 with this perception.

The Apocalypse has a great deal of framework; no one can miss that. It bears the promise of formal consistency, of a continuous grand architecture spanning the whole book, into which all the visionary detail is to be fitted. Yet, as we advance, it does not appear to us that the promise is fulfilled. The lines of the schematic architecture elude us, and the work seems in danger of disintegrating into a mere pile of visions and oracles. Then architectural elements reappear, yet not in such order as plainly to make up the unity of a single edifice. We are left unable to reconcile ourselves either to the hypothesis of formal order or to the hypothesis of its absence. Must we conclude that St John attempted form and broke down in the execution of it? Or must we accept the supposition of a demon-editor who has broken up St John’s noble building by his senseless omissions, rearrangements and additions?⁹⁵

The principle of recapitulation is not a mere literary option, but a hermeneutical one. Mueller argues that this issue defines the approach to the interpretation of Revelation, whether a preterist, historicist, idealist, eclectic, or some other one. In other words, presuppositions about the structure may contribute to choosing a particular method of interpretation or another

⁹⁴ Krodel, *Revelation*, 61.

⁹⁵ Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Image: The Making of St. John Apocalypse* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 36.

one.⁹⁶ In turn, Stefanovic defends that “the application of the recapitulative principle can be very helpful to the interpreter of Revelation,” because information and insights obtained from one clear passage may unlock the theological meaning of “parallel difficult ones.”⁹⁷

Mueller considers recapitulation as “a technique used by an ancient author that places several parts of this literary work—in this case the Apocalypse—next to each other so that to a large extent they parallel each other, especially chronologically and with regard to subject matter.” According to him, in Revelation, “each vision may lead to the final consummation,” but “adding new perspective each time.”⁹⁸ Krodel argues that recapitulation points to “the thematic parallels between the three septets which recapitulate each other.” Moreover, for him, “the interludes of chap. 7 and 10-11 make impossible to translate the sequence of visions into a chronological sequence.”⁹⁹ Paulien highlights that “literary recapitulation is typical of Hebrew style.”¹⁰⁰

Metzger defines recapitulation as a Semitic way to tell a story. He observes that “the trumpets more or less repeat the revelation of the seven seals, though they present it from God’s standpoint.” This literary feature is “a product of the Semitic mind, which runs through the whole picture again and again” to get its memorization and clear understanding of the

⁹⁶ Ekkehardt Muller, “When the Prophecy Repeats Itself: Recapitulation in Revelation” (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 6.

⁹⁷ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 29.

⁹⁸ Mueller, “When the Prophecy Repeats Itself . . .,” 8.

⁹⁹ Krodel, *Revelation*, 60.

¹⁰⁰ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 334.

essential message.¹⁰¹ Beale mentions recapitulation in Hebrew Bible as in Isaiah, Ezequiel, Daniel, and Zechariah.¹⁰² Yarbro Collins adds that “the phenomenon of recapitulation is not unique to the book of Revelation,” but, in fact, “it seems to be characterized of a number of writings with an eschatological interest.” She defends that “the visions of the book of Daniel repeat the same basic sequence of events in four parallel accounts: (1) 7:1-18, (2) 7:19-27, (3) 8:1-25, (4) 10:12-12:3.”¹⁰³ By commenting the parallel visions in Daniel, Mueller establishes some principles to work with the prophecies. “All the visions in Daniel extend from the time of the author to the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God.”¹⁰⁴ From this perspective, when the set of visions gets the final consummation, the reader should consider the possibility that through the following visions the author may be starting a new set of visions. This is a very important issue in dealing with Revelation 16:12-21, because in v. 17 Johns reported the voice from heaven “It is done!,” which mark the consummation again and what happens after is to be seen as a cyclical report.

Yarbro Collins defends the principle of recapitulation in studying what she considers the main five cycles of visions: seven seals (6:1-8:5), the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19), seven unnumbered visions (12:1-15:4), the seven bowls (15:1-16:21), with the Babylon appendix (17:1-19:10), and the seven unnumbered visions (19:11-21:8), with the Jerusalem appendix (21:9-22:5). She defends as well as that the motifs of persecution, the punishment of the

¹⁰¹ Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 55-56.

¹⁰² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 135.

¹⁰³ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 34.

¹⁰⁴ Muller, “When the Prophecy Repeats Itself...,” 10.

nations, the triumph of God, the Lamb, and or the faithful highlight the recapitulation in these five cycles.¹⁰⁵ She notes that “there are many outlines of the book as there are interpreters,” and that “the root of the problem is the presence of the numerous parallel passages and repetition within the book.” This problem of the structure of the book of Revelation “cannot be separated from a variety of interpretive issues.”¹⁰⁶ She adds, “we have seen that each of the five series of visions, beginning with the revelation of the content of the scroll with seven seals, recapitulates the same pattern of eschatological events,” and “what is merely alluded to in the first cycle is clarified in the second.”¹⁰⁷

The feature of recapitulation, or the repetition of the same basic pattern in a variety of specific formulation, is not limited to eschatological Jewish and Christian writings, but it is an essential characteristic of mythic and religious language. Paul Ricoeur states that “the reason for this is that myth aims at the intuition of a cosmic whole, its intent is the restoration of the wholeness which is not *given*, but simply *aimed at*.” Thus, the myth method must be symbolic, and “the totality of the various formulations thus represents the message more fully than any single expression.”¹⁰⁸ In this similar line, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss says that the religious texts and myths, as well as “oral literature,” are “so much addicted to duplication, triplication or quadruplication of the same sequence.” The reason for that, according to him, is that the “repetition has as its function to make the structure of the myth apparent.”¹⁰⁹ Both

¹⁰⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 32, 43-44.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1963], 167-68.

¹⁰⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth,” *The Journal of American Folklore*. Vol. 68, No. 270. Myth: A Symposium (Nov-Dec 1955): 443.

Ricoeur and Strauss are considering myth and religious texts here as an ancient account of reality not necessarily an illusionary view of it.

In his study on Revelation's structure, Farrer realized, may be as the pioneer, the so-called sanctuary visions in Revelation. He considers those as "scene of sanctuary" of "sabbath-visions," and he characterized them as "liturgical and ritual."¹¹⁰ About the last heptad in Revelation 19-21, he says:

Nothing could be more formally beautiful than this series. There are four visions of the great battle, then two of the kingdom, the many millennial thrones and the one great throne of judgment. Then there is a seven vision of the final Sabbath, in which God will abide with men in a renovated world.¹¹¹

According to him, "the six first visions [messages, seals, trumpets, signs in 12-14, bowls, and signs in 19-21] were analogous to the six works of Genesis, the seventh to God's sabbath."¹¹² Collin Brown also discerns "seven parallel but cumulative visions of history culminating in the vision of the New Jerusalem, corresponding to the seven days of creation of Genesis 1."¹¹³

As the reader goes through Revelation soon realizes that the reading is constantly interrupted for breaks on the narrative. Fiorenza says that "the forward movement of the

¹¹⁰ Farrer, *A Rebirth of Image*, 46. Farrer highlights the seven signs of 12-14 with: 12:1, 3; 13:1, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1. Moreover, he sees others seven signs in 19-22: (1) and I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse (19:11); (2) and I saw an angel standing in the sun (19:17); (3) and I saw the Beast and the kings of the earth (19:19); (4) and I saw an angel descending from heaven (20:1); (5) and I saw thrones, and they sat on them (20:4); (6) and I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it (20:11); (7) and I saw a new heaven and a new earth ...and the holy city saw I, New Jerusalem (21:1, 2) (Farrer, *A Rebirth of Image*, 45-48).

¹¹¹ Farrer, *A Rebirth of Image*, 57.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 59.

¹¹³ Collin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, 3 vols (Grand Rapids, MI, 1978), 2:931.

narrative is also interrupted through the interludes,” among others narratives devices. The interludes, she explains, are “visions or hymns of eschatological protection and salvation (cf. 7:1-17; 11:15-19; 12:10; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 10:1-9; 20:4-6).¹¹⁴ Others interludes are recognized for others commentators (cf. 11:1-14). Krodel considers that a minor interlude is 16:13-15, which anticipates 19:11-21, in his view.¹¹⁵ According to Fiorenza, “as the author interrupts the patterns of continuous narrative and cyclic repetition through the insertion of these anticipatory visions and auditions, he expresses in his composition the relationship between present reality and eschatological future.”¹¹⁶ Thus, the interludes anticipate events and scenes in heaven or make flashbacks on the events on the earth.

It is necessary to notice the difference between a septet of visions in Revelation which in pattern has seven elements and the interludes as a scene or a flashback to the previous account. Revelation 17-18, the crucial section after the seven plagues, is usually seen as an interlude. But this section retakes the beast of seven heads of chapters 12 and 13 (recapitulation?), introduce a new symbol (the harlot), and shows its punishment. Revelation 17-18, together with Revelation 19-20, can form another heptad of seven elements, or seven judgments. In this case instead of interlude this section may be another cycle. This will be analyzed with more details in the following chapters.

Thus, the presuppositional notions of intertextuality and recapitulation are very crucial in understanding Revelation. Those principles have received attention by the part of many of recent interpreters. They can be very helpful in the attempt to unpack the meaning and time of

¹¹⁴ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 171.

¹¹⁵ Krodel, *Revelation*, 58.

¹¹⁶ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 171.

Armageddon and of the sixth bowl plague. As Mueller purposes, recapitulation is connected to what kind of approach is applied to Revelation, in terms of the preterist, historicist, futurist, or idealist schools. Since those principles are so connected, the following chapter presents a brief summary of those schools of prophetic interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

LINES OF INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

The understanding of Revelation's visions depends on a number of presuppositions. Besides realizing the complex structure and the literary devices, the researcher of John's revelatory message needs to deal with the lines of interpretation, among them the preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist approaches. A good number of recent interpreters have mixed some principles from different of those traditional views in an eclectic approach.¹¹⁷ They understand that is not possible to confine Revelation within a set of hard presuppositions.

In order to get a better view on the topic in discussion in this book, that is the position of Armageddon in the historical time, we need to consider in basic terms how the book is seen in each one of those hermeneutical lines. After a basic definition of each one, we summarize briefly how they understand the last battle visualized in Revelation 16:16.

Preterist Interpretation

The preterist researchers, in the line of theological liberalism,¹¹⁸ use to seek for the gaps and redactional accidents in the text in attempting to identify its historical process of

¹¹⁷ Four traditional ways of understanding Revelation 4-22 have emerged in the history of the church. In our days, additional mixed views have been developed by combining elements from these four traditions" (Johnson, "Revelation," 408).

¹¹⁸ Johnson, "Revelation," 409. As a theological system, the preterist method of interpretation did not appear until 1614, when a Spanish Jesuit named Alcazar developed its main lines. "Today some

writing. They do that because for them the historical settings are everything that matters in Revelation. The preterists see the book of Revelation as “arising out of the situation of the first Christians in the world of the Roman Empire which dominates the scenes of the book.”¹¹⁹ The author or the community where the text emerge was concerned with the church of those days. The book would have been written from this historical setting and, indeed, has nothing more in focus.

According to preterist view, the book of Revelation is a “contemporary and imminent historical document.” From this hermeneutical approach, the book comes from the Jewish apocalyptic method of producing “tracts for the times” in order to “encourage faithfulness during intense persecution.”¹²⁰ The tribulation under the hands of the emperors is the center of the symbolic scenes. In this perspective, the symbolism is considered the seers’ art and ability. The prophet has the skill to report historical events in a special language, full of symbolism. The preterist and critical interpreters assume that “Revelation is a fanciful human composition which utilized historical material of the day and expressed it in Jewish apocalyptic imagery or in Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian, and Grecian symbolism.”¹²¹ Thus, Revelation was written to “confirm the believer’s faith during the expectation for persecution at the hands of Emperor

commentators argue that the events were imminent but not yet realized when John wrote; hence, they suggest an imminent historical view” (Johnson, “Revelation,” 409).

¹¹⁹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 18.

¹²⁰ Johnson, “Revelation,” 409.

¹²¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of saint John’s Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 214.

Domitian.” The merit of the symbolic language is that this historical book is able to “strengthen the faith of persons who read its words at any time.”¹²²

For the preterist scholars, the seven seals correspond to seven emperors between Tiberius (14-37 CE) and Domitian (81-96 CE). The two beasts of Revelation 13 are symbols of “imperial Rome and the imperial priesthood.”¹²³ Murphy relates the second beast of Revelation 13 to the “cult officials” in the ancient Roman Empire who promotes the “worship to the emperor.”¹²⁴ Rome and its emperors and culture are also depicted in the images of the dragon, beasts, and the harlot.

Beale says that the preterist perspective has two main forms. A first group sees the visions of Revelation as a kind of prophetic language to depict the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, which, of course, requires that the Apocalypse be dated prior to 70 CE. In this line, “Babylon the Great” represents Israel, who aims Rome in oppressing Christians.¹²⁵ Lenski says this regards Nero as the beast of Revelation 13 and accepts the fiction that Nero (either dead by his own hand or in hiding) “was soon to reappear with a great army of Parthians to take Rome for himself and to be the great antichrist.”¹²⁶ The other group of preterist interpreters, in Beale’s view, holds that Revelation is a prophecy done based on conjectures of the fall of the Roman

¹²² John R. Yattes, *Revelation: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 25.

¹²³ Johnson, “Revelation,” 409.

¹²⁴ Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998), 309.

¹²⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 44.

¹²⁶ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 214.

Empire in the fifth century. And in this perspective, “Babylon the Great” is an evil system who persecute the saints. “The purpose of the book is to encourage Christians to endure.”¹²⁷

Murphy says that, in this setting, the pouring of the sixth bowl dries up the Euphrates in order that the kings of the east can invade the Roman Empire (Rev 16:12). The seer uses the image of the drying up of the Euphrates as echoes of “several incidents in the history of God’s dealings with the world.”¹²⁸ The “kings from the east” would be the Parthians and their satellites. As the waters of Euphrates would dry up (v. 12), they could cross the river to attack Rome. “The application of the mythic elements to envisioned historical events enabled John to introduce the perspective which perceives the execution of God’s judgment in and through expected historical catastrophes.”¹²⁹

Since the Euphrates is mentioned at the sixth trumpet, Krodel understands that the Parthian threats to Roman Empire are in focus. The sixth trumpet vision depicts a vast mythical cavalry army coming from the Euphrates, swarming across the land and killing one-third of the people (Rev 9:13-19). Krodel says that “this mythical army is now historicized.” The “kings from the east,” the Parthians, and their vassals are ready to invade the empire. “The Euphrates river has ceased to exist as protective natural boundary.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 45.

¹²⁸ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 341.

¹²⁹ Krodel, *Revelation*, 281. Although that, Krodel says that “the cosmic dimension of the plagues *also* requires their futuristic interpretation” (Krodel, *Revelation*, 284, italics mine).

¹³⁰ Krodel, *Revelation*, 285. According to Krodel, “which is not yet clear is how these two groups of kings (v. 12, 14) [kings from the east and kings of the whole world] will be related to each other. Will the invading Parthian forces (with Nero in the lead) be met by the armies of Rome and its satellites for the final battle at *Armageddon*?” (Krodel, *Revelation*, 286).

From this preterist perspective, Krodel sees Revelation 16:13-16 as a kind of interlude. He says that with the phrase “and I saw” John initiates a new vision which contains a new subject that is related to the Parthian invasion and yet quite distinct from it. “The actors of this interlude are not the [political] kings from the east but the demonic triumvirate of *dragon* (cf. chap. 12), *beast* (cf. 13:1-8), and *false prophet* (13:11-18).”¹³¹ The three spirits like frogs that come out from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (16:13) represent the imperial priesthood who work to make the propaganda of the Empire. “As fire, sulfur, and smoke come from the mouths of the horses in the sixth trumpet and harm humanity (9:17-18), here evil spirits come from the mouths of the three figures to harm humanity.”¹³²

Thus, preterist view understands Revelation as a historical document but written in a symbolic language. It is very useful to understand the Christians experience in the Roman Empire, and as a report Revelation can be helpful in other times to teach God’s people to survive and be faithful as they receive the witness about the first Christians. The preterists understand the battle of Armageddon as a preview or a symbolic representation of the Roman’s wars against the Parthians.

Historicist Interpretation

The understanding of the historicist interpreters is that Revelation is a prophetic and predictive visionary report, and the seer did have visions from heaven to foresee the future events in an objective manner. Those events reported by the visions are not necessarily about the history of the world, but about the journey of Christian church through the times until the

¹³¹ Krodel, *Revelation*, 286.

¹³² Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 341.

entrance into the kingdom of God at the end of times. Evidently there are many lines in the historicist perspective that is not the purpose of this chapter to review in details.

The historicist interpreter looks for reference to the symbols of Revelation in the history of the Christian church. Usually this methodology leads the historicist researcher to be more focused in history than in the Bible text itself. Meanwhile the historicist understands Revelation as a “symbolic prophecy of the history of Christianity.” The symbols designate “historical movements and events” in an objective manner.¹³³ Beale says that historicist interpretation generally sees Revelation as predicting the “major movement of Christian history.”¹³⁴ The historicists see the symbols of Revelation “as setting out in broad outline the history of western Europe and as stretching right on until the second coming of Christ.”¹³⁵

According to Lenski, what he calls “Chronological Group” seeks “to fit the events of history in their chronological sequence into what Revelation reveals.” They use to cite many dates of European history in “due order,” and some interpreters try to figure out even “the dates yet to come including that of their millennium and of the Parousia.”¹³⁶ The historicist defends the idea that a day in prophecy corresponds to one actual year in history.¹³⁷ Usually, they name among other things, the decline of the Roman Empire, the persecutions of Diocletian (303), Constantine, the Gothic and the Saracen invasions, the Waldenses, the Reformation, the 1,260 years of persecution and Inquisition, the French Revolution, and

¹³³ Yattes, *Revelation*, 25.

¹³⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 46.

¹³⁵ Morris, *Revelation*, 19.

¹³⁶ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 215.

¹³⁷ See Alberto R. Timm, “Miniature Symbolization and the Year-Day Principle of Prophetic Interpretation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 42, no. 1 (2004): 149-167.

World War I and World War II. In a critical analysis, Lenski says that “the world outside Europe, save Turks, is disregarded in a narrow, provincial way” by the part of historicists.¹³⁸

As a historicist, Jonathan Knight discuss the motivation for Revelation writing. He doubts the evidence for a Domitian persecution as a putative event for the work of John, and defends that a broader motive can explain such a valuable Christian work. According to him, the “persecution theory” is not able to explain Revelation. A more convincible motivation would be the called “crisis history” which open the room for the prophecies about the coming of the kingdom of God.¹³⁹

The historicist approach is considered to have started with Joachim of Floris (d. 1202), a monastic who claimed to have received on Easter night a special vision that revealed to him God’s plan for the ages. He would assign the principle of day-year to interpret the 1,260 days of the Apocalypse (ch. 11, 12, 13). “In his scheme, the book was a prophecy of the events of western history from the times of the apostles (in some varieties, from Creation) until Joachim’s own time.”¹⁴⁰ Under Floris’ influence, the Franciscans “interpreted Babylon not only as pagan Rome but also as papal Rome.”¹⁴¹ Later, Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers came to adopt this view. “This approach was followed by most of the leading Protestant

¹³⁸ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 215.

¹³⁹ Jonathan Knight, *Revelation: Readings: A New Biblical Commentary*, 2nd edition (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2011), 25.

¹⁴⁰ Johnson, “Revelation,” 409.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

interpreters at least from the seventeenth century until the preterist and futurist schools gained ascendancy in the twentieth century.”¹⁴²

Oral Collins sees all the report of Revelation as prediction to fulfil in some phase or time in Christian history. He considers the seals as prophecies about the first centuries of Christian church, followed by the trumpets that talk about the fall of Roman Empire, and the seven bowls as taking place after that fall. He defends that the details of the first four seals “correspond so well with events of the first three centuries that the reader familiar with that history should immediately see the correlation.”¹⁴³ He laments that historicist view has been victim of prejudice for many interpreters. “We do not suggest, however, that the book of Revelation gives either a full or a balanced history of the church, as some critics of the Protestant-historicist interpretation represent our approach.” Historicist interpreters, he argues, have understood that the Revelation focuses on “the Fourth Kingdom, the Roman Empire—the unnamed beast of Daniel seven.” In Revelation 11 and 13, this focus leads to “the rise of the Antichrist power within the sphere of the Roman Empire, its war against the true church, and in subsequent chapters finally to Christ’s victory over Antichrist and the end of this age.”¹⁴⁴

The vision about the “drying up of the river Euphrates” (Rev 16:12) is a broad discussion among historicist interpreters. But a more traditional line understands that it has to do with the fall of Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. Oral Collins understand that the

¹⁴² Oral Edmond Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus: An Introduction Analysis and Commentary of the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 120.

¹⁴³ Oral Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus*, 120.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

interpreter “should look in the 19th century for such a Middle Eastern nation that suffered great loss of power or falls” to find the fulfilment of this symbolism. “Historicist scholars have not been slow to recognize that exactly that condition occurred with the Ottoman Turkish Empire.”¹⁴⁵ He explains that the “drying up” of “the Turkish Empire can be traced as a gradual process through the nineteenth century until its power in the Middle East was broken and it was reduced in 1918 to the current boundaries of Turkey, confined to the sub-continent of Asia Minor.”¹⁴⁶ In his perspective, this “elimination of the Turkish Empire” in the Middle East has served “to prepare the way for the kings from the east” (Rev 16:12). “Several kings and their kingdoms were established as the result of the circumstances surrounding the League of Nation’s partition of the Ottoman territories and the subsequent dissolution of the British Empire in the Middle East.”¹⁴⁷ According to him, this movement in the political world affairs announces the end of the times.

In the 19th century the Millerites adopted this understanding and relates the historical event also with the fifth and sixth trumpet in Revelation 9. They saw the fall of the Ottoman

¹⁴⁵ Oral Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus*, 375.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 375-376.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 376.

Empire in the Middle East as a strong evidence that Jesus would come in 1844.¹⁴⁸ In their perspective the seven last plagues were being poured out in their time.¹⁴⁹

Following the sequence of the text, for the historicists, the work of the three unclean spirits would succeed the fall of Ottoman Empire. John says that “after” the drying up of the Euphrates, “three unclean frog-like spirits” came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The fulfilment of this vision “must reflect conditions existing at the time of or subsequent to the ‘drying up of the Euphrates,’ ... [from] the later 19th century to the present.” Those spirits would “promote ideologies that oppose the true Gospel and the People of God.”¹⁵⁰ Oral Collins reports that the spirit “from the mouth of the dragon” suggests “atheism or some pagan ideology” and “atheistic communism.” He says that this spirit has also to do with “the prevalent existentialism and relativism of post-modernist philosophy, which rejects absolute truth.” According to him, the spirit “from the mouth of the beast” focuses on the “Vatican and the Papal Antichrist.” And finally, the spirit “from the mouth of the false prophet” points to the “Roman Catholic priesthood.” Oral Collins defends also that Catholic Jesuits introduced both the futurist and the preterist alternatives to confuse the “Protestant understanding of prophecy.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Daniel David Royo, “Josiah Litch: His Life, Work, and Use of His Writings, on Selected Topics, by Seventh-day Adventist Writers,” Andrews University Seminary Master’s Theses (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2009), 67-68. Besides the Millerites, many interpreters in that context saw the Islam’s threats to Christian Europe in the 19th as the application of the First and Second Woes of Revelation 9 (cf. David Campbell, *Illustrations of Prophecy; Particularly the Evening and Morning Visions of Daniel, and the Apocalyptic Visions of John* [Boston: David Campbell, 1840], 326-339).

¹⁴⁹ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations,” 436.

¹⁵⁰ Oral Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus*, 377

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

In this perspective, historicists see Revelation as an objective prediction of the future in terms of the coming of the kingdom of God. The symbols employed in Revelation 16:12-16 are connected to events from the 19th century and the following times close to Jesus' coming. Usually the more traditional historicists see Armageddon as a political and military battle among nations of the present age or in future.

Futuristic Interpretation

The futurist interpreters consider that the Bible prophecy has a specific focus on the end-time with Antichrist's manifestation and the consummation of human history. In their view the seer does not concern his present neither further historical events because both has to do with secular and world affairs. The goal of eschatological Bible prophecy is to foresee the arriving of God's kingdom.

In this perspective, the futurist interpreter seeks the references for the symbols of Revelation in the eschatological future that is ever close. "Revelation has little direct value for the church prior to the last few years of its existence."¹⁵² Yattes says that "these interpreters see Revelation as a prediction of events in their present context that mark the imminent end of the world." Today, "futurists usually find fulfilment for these predictions in situations related to the founding of the state of Israel."¹⁵³ They see the seven seals (Rev 4-8:1) and all the rest of the book of Revelation as being concerned with the "end of the world, and as prefiguring those events which will usher in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 215.

¹⁵³ Yattes, *Revelation*, 26.

¹⁵⁴ Morris, *Revelation*, 20.

Beale also talks about two forms of futuristic approach, but both understand Revelation 4-21 as referring exclusively to a future time immediately preceding the end of history. According to him, the most popular form is the “dispensational futurism.” Those interpreters are very literalists and generally see the “order of the visions as representing the historical order of future events,” including the restoration of the ethnic Israel to its land, the rapture of the church into heaven, the antichrist reign, the war of the nations over Jerusalem and the second coming of Jesus when he will defeat the nations to save the Jews.¹⁵⁵ The second version of futurism interprets the church as the “true Israel,” and denies the “pretribulation rapture.”¹⁵⁶ Lenski explains that, in their concerning about the end-time prophecies, the futurists foresee “the last seven years” as a critical period before Jesus’ coming. The Jews are assigned a great role. Revelation has little direct value for the church prior to the last few years of its existence.”¹⁵⁷

In this line, for the futurist interpreters “the seals, trumpets, and bowls refer to events still in the future,” and they are literal, successive, and chronological. The beasts of chapters 13 and 17 are symbolic representations of 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.”¹⁵⁸

As one of the most popular futurist scholars, Grant Osborne considers Revelation 16:12-16 as the depiction of the last battle before the coming of Jesus. He states that the

¹⁵⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 47.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵⁷ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 215.

¹⁵⁸ Johnson, “Revelation,” 408.

“drying up of the Euphrates” may not be seen as a literal event at the “end of history,” but a symbolic one. According to him, the “kings from the east” and the “kings of the whole earth” will coalesce themselves to fight the battle of Armageddon. This battle has to be seen from the picture of the war of Gog and Magog (Ezek 38-39), or the last battle “against the people of God.” Osborne argues that “the natural barriers between nations and tribes [nowadays] are disappearing.” This will be a condition of “one-world government centering on the beast,” or the Antichrist. Thus, “the drying up is the antithesis of the drying of the Red Sea, as the saints are attacked rather than delivered.”¹⁵⁹ He adds that, “behind the political opposition and religious blasphemy of both the Roman Empire of John’s day [the background of the eschatological symbols] and the “beast’s empire at the end of history” are “demonic forces leading the pagans into worshiping wrong gods,” who get that by performing “sings.”¹⁶⁰

Johnson says that after “nearly a ten-century eclipse,” during which time the allegorical method prevailed in the interpretation of Revelation, the futurist view was “revived in the sixteenth century by Franciscus Ribera, a Spanish Jesuit.” Ribera defended that the beasts was a representation, not of the Papacy, but of the Antichrist of the end time. Babylon, according to him, was not Rome under papal rule, but a “degenerate Rome of a future age.”¹⁶¹

Thus, the futuristic interpretation of Revelation is concerned with the last events of human history. The battle of Armageddon will result of the end of the boundaries among the

¹⁵⁹ Grant Osborne, *Revelation: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 591.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 592.

¹⁶¹ Johnson, “Revelation,” 408.

nations in favor of the worldwide government of the Antichrist. At the end of all things, Jesus will rescue his people from the great tribulation by destroying their enemies.

Idealistic Interpretation

The idealistic perspective on Revelation is not so different than of the whole Bible. Revelation is a book with a special symbolic language through which the seer represents the battle between good and evil. For the idealist interpreters the rich language of prophecy can be applied to every situation in every time of the journey of God's people on earth.

Yattes says that the idealist interpreters believe that the references to the symbols of Revelation are to be found, "not in specific events in any time period, but in the realm of ideas." The prophetic book is, therefore, a "symbolic portrayal of the spiritual conflict between the forces of God and Satan."¹⁶² Beale adds that "the most radical form of this view holds that the book is a timeless depiction of this struggle," the conflict between the forces of good and evil. For him, the problem with this alternative interpretation is that there is no "any final consummation to history" in the book of Revelation.¹⁶³ Morris says that the idealists maintain that there are "few or no references in Revelation to happenings, whether at the time of the writer or subsequently." On this view the whole book is concerned with "ideas and principles"¹⁶⁴ without any reference to history neither past, present or future.

Because this timeless notion, the idealistic perspective is also called "spiritualizing" method of prophetic interpretation. The idealists seek to spiritualize everything into a "poetic-

¹⁶² Yattes, *Revelation*, 26.

¹⁶³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 48.

¹⁶⁴ Morris, *Revelation*, 20.

prophetic description of the struggle that, since the fall of man, has been going on between righteousness and sin, Christ and Satan.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, for the idealist interpreters, the book of Revelation is “basically poetical, symbolic, and spiritual in nature.”¹⁶⁶

Revelation, therefore, does not predict any specific historical events at all. On the contrary, this book “sets forth timeless truths concerning the battle between good and evil that continues throughout the church age.”¹⁶⁷ As a system of prophetic interpretation, according to Johnson, idealism is more recent than the three other schools and somewhat more difficult to distinguish from the earlier allegorizing approaches of the Alexandrian thinkers Clement and Origen. “In general, the idealistic view is marked by its refusal to identify any of the images with specific future events, whether in the history of the church or with regard to the end of all things.”¹⁶⁸

From his likely idealistic perspective, Johnson considers the harlot in Revelation 17 as any evil “manifestations from the past or in modern times,” and “the archetype of every evil system opposed to God in history.”¹⁶⁹ About the drying up of the waters of Euphrates he understands that John is not describing the “invasion of the Parthian hordes advancing on Rome or any future political invasion of Israel.” Instead that, John is describing the “eschatological defeat of the forces of evil,” though “eschatological” is not necessarily “in time.” With the image of the Euphrates, John is describing the “unseen rulers of this world” in

¹⁶⁵ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 214.

¹⁶⁶ Johnson, “Revelation,” 410.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 738, 745.

battle “with the Sovereign of the universe.”¹⁷⁰ In this battle, the kings are under the influence of the spirit of the harlot as an image of the system of evil opposed to God, as seen in the work of the three unclean spirits.

Thus, for the idealists Revelation depicts in symbolic language a timeless battle between good and evil. Historical events, nations, characters, and movements have no mean in this perspective. But the people can identify their own life struggles as they read the book of Revelation. Armageddon is a spiritual “eschatological” battle of the system of evil against God.

Eclectic Understanding

The most common perspectives in the recent years result from the combination of principles and presuppositions from two or more of those traditional methods of prophetic interpretation. Usually what is predominant in the eclectic interpreters is that they are more focused on the text itself and avoid to adventure in historical events, especially those of the Middle Ages, modern, and present time. In the eclectic view of Revelation, the war between good and evil is emphasized. There is also a strong attention to language and cultural signs as well as to symbols.

Yattes states that, in working with prophetic interpretation, it is hard to find two interpreters with the same methodological presuppositions and similar conclusions. About the four main perspectives, he says that “categories such as these are never clear-cut, and combinations are possible, even likely.”¹⁷¹ In the same line, Morris defends that “it seems that

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, “Revelation,” 733.

¹⁷¹ Yattes, *Revelation*, 26.

elements from more than one of these [four] views are required for a satisfactory understanding of Revelation.”¹⁷²

Beale defends and uses a “more viable, modified version of the idealistic perspective that acknowledge the final eschaton” which he calls “eclecticism.” For this perspective, “no specific prophesied historical events are discerned in the book, except for the final coming of Christ to deliver and judge and to establish the final form of the kingdom in a consummated new creation.”¹⁷³ According to him, the book of Revelation by using symbols “portrays events throughout history, which is understood to be under the sovereignty of the Lamb as a result of his death and resurrection.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, the focus of the eclectics is more in the end of history than in its flow, likely the futurists.

Johnson analyses that the preterist and to a lesser extent the preterist-futurist’s views are misled. On the other hand, he even argues, “John is describing the final judgment and the physical, bodily return of Christ to the world.” But it would be also true that “in every age Revelation continues to encourage the church in persecution as well as to warn the church of the beast’s satanically energized, multifaceted deception.” Its language describes the deeper realities of the conflict of Christ’s sovereignty with satanic power rather than the mere temporary historical-political entities, whether past (such as Rome) or future.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, he assumes that the idealistic, and a in less level preterist and futuristic schools, are well present in the eclectic view.

¹⁷² Morris, *Revelation*, 20.

¹⁷³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 48.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷⁵ Johnson, “Revelation,” 410.

The eclectics avoid historical issues, especially those of Middle Ages. Some defends that the Jewish apocalyptic prophets related their messages to the immediate historical and political entities. However, Revelation is of another nature in this point. “The beast and Babylon describe more a theological than a political entity.”¹⁷⁶

It is possible that the issue here, about Jewish and John’s Apocalypses, has to do with the definition between classic and eschatological prophecy. The Jewish prophecy is connected to Jewish reality as a nation among others, while John’s prophecy is about Christianity in the world of all the nations.

Usually the eclectics consider the battle of Armageddon in a similar line of the futurists, as the final war between the armies of God and those of the Antichrist.

Comments

In respect to preterist view, one must consider that Revelation was not written in regard momentaneous persecution and a context of human crisis. John’s visions were never given to alleviate the tension between faith and experience, nor to bring about a “catharsis” of Christian envy and hatred.¹⁷⁷ “Rather, they were meant to heighten the tension, so that there can be no compromise between worship of God and idolatry.”¹⁷⁸ It was written because the reality of the exaltation of the Lamb who was slain but resurrected to take all the authority and power over the universe. Revelation is about the exalted Christ who has all sovereignty in his hands to

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, “Revelation,” 410.

¹⁷⁷ See Adela Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1984). Stefanovic says that the primary purpose of Revelation is to “assure us of Jesus’ presence with his people throughout history and final events” (Ranko Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation: Reader’s Introduction to the Apocalypse* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013], 12).

¹⁷⁸ Krodell, *Revelation*, 68.

consummate the plan of redemption. In response to pure idealistic view, it has to be stated that the enthroned Christ started to open the seals in order to fulfill soon in history the mystery of God to establish his kingdom on the earth. He says “I am coming quickly” (Rev 22:20).

Paulien says that the statement of Revelation 1:3 implies that the “original readers of Revelation were intended to understand its basic message without difficulty.” In considering that, “the best method for interpreting Revelation is one that helps us understand the book, as far as possible today, in the way the original readers would have understood it.”¹⁷⁹

Thus, every school of interpretation may have contributions to the reading of Revelation. May be said that in grade of importance for this present work on Armageddon, the order of contribution of the schools is that the historicist and idealistic are the most contributors, and the futuristic and preterist are the lesser.

Yattes considers that the vision of Revelation 16:12-16 about the “demonic spirits” that assemble the kings “for battle on the great day of God the Almighty” is exemplar in showing the different schools of interpretation. The preterist interpreters argue that the battle is between the “Parthian regional rulers and the Roman Empire” of John’s first-century context. The historicist view holds that the battle is traditionally among the nations of the world in global clashdown, or is more recently the last conflict of the religious and political world against God’s faithful. The idealists believe the battle is symbolic of the “spiritual warfare between God and Satan” that has already been won through Christ’s death on the cross but continues indefinitely “between the faithful and their persecutors.” The futuristic view emphasizes the presence of the definitive article and sees it as the “eschatological battle between God and the forces of evil on the Day of the Lord.” The dispensationalists might see this as the war of

¹⁷⁹ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 5-6.

“liberation of the redeemed Jewish remnant,” left after the “rapture as a witness during the seven years of tribulation on the earth preceding the millennial rule of Christ.”¹⁸⁰ Yattes understands that the combination of those positions would be better: “The passage draws on the [past] imminent conflict between Rome and the Parthians to symbolize the *permanent* conflict between God and Satan, which manifests itself in the persecution of the faithful by evil individuals and institutions, and which may, indeed, *escalate as the eschaton approaches*.”¹⁸¹

As Revelation is treated as a literary composition, the textual and linguistic explanations of different interpreters whether preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist can be useful in building a reading of the book. Thus, in the following discussion on Armageddon many of those scholars are quoted in order to take advantage of their literary, linguistic, or textual discoveries and explanations although their general perspective on the book can be different than of this present author.

¹⁸⁰ Yattes, *Revelation*, 296.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, italics mine.

CHAPTER 3

LITERARY SETTING OF ARMAGEDDON IN REVELATION

The setting of Armageddon account in Revelation is very important to understand the meaning of this last battle. The battle motif in John's book is actually widespread in the whole book, but especially in chapters 12-19 after the introduction of the evil trinity. The discussion that follows here seeks to delimit this big periscope with more attention to the context of the last seven plagues and its literary issues.

In this literary discussion, the last bowl is seen here as distinguished and separate from the others six as occurs in the seals and trumpets visions. The last bowl may be seen as only a celebration and it is similar to the Sabbath at creation account with no more work to be done in terms of salvation plan, but only rest and celebration. This would be closer to the seventh seal with the "silence" in heaven (8:1) and the seventh trumpet with the celebration of the arriving of Christ's "kingdom" (11:17).

LaRondelle calls attention to the fact that Revelation 16, the account of the last seven plagues, is located between the vision of the final of intercessory and atonement ministry in heaven in Revelation 15 and the judgment of the harlot in Revelation 17.¹⁸² In Revelation 15 the angels who have the bowls come from the "tabernacle of the covenant law" (15:6-7,

¹⁸² LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 134.

NIV)¹⁸³ and anybody may no longer enter into the temple (15:8) which indicates that the high priest has finished his work at the temple.¹⁸⁴ At the same time the chapter 16 is followed by the vision of the judgment of the harlot, in Revelation 17-18. Thus, judgment is the content of the whole section.

Seven Judgments

The seven plagues have the full wrath of God (Rev 14:10) and with them his wrath is completed (15:1). This indicates that after the seven plagues there is no more wrath neither punishment. The heavenly statement “It is done!” at the seven plague (16:17) suggests that all the judgments of God against the evil world is finished at this point. This will be discussed in more details in the following pages. The punishment of the “harlot” (Rev 17-18) may be taken as the very effect of the sixth plague since the drying up of the Euphrates’ waters *depicts* (not announce) the fall of Babylon.¹⁸⁵ Together with chapters 17-18, chapters 19-20 with the destruction of the “ten kings” (political powers; 19:18), “their armies” (military powers; 18-19), the “beast” (imperial power; 19:20), the “false prophet” (religious power; 19:20), all the wicked (20:9), and the “dragon” (20:10; these last two after the millennium) may be seen as a kind of “judgment” to eradicate the sin from the universe not necessarily to bestow God’s wrath which has been fulfilled with the seven bowls. Those together form the *seven judgments*

¹⁸³ cf. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 487.

¹⁸⁴ In Revelation 8:2 it is suggested that the angels who have the trumpets come from the holy place of the temple. In Revelation 4:6 and 9:13, the expression “before God” or “before the throne” indicates the holy place, where it is the altar of incense (cf. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 484, 487; see also Richard M. Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Book I [Silver Springs, MA: Biblical Research Institute, 1992], 113-115).

¹⁸⁵ Paulien says that Revelation 17 is “particularly an exegesis of Revelation 16:12-16 (which includes reference to Armageddon), the sixth bowl plague” (Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 208).

that could be seen as the *sixth cycle* of visions (the harlot, kings, their armies, beast, false prophet, all the wicked, and the dragon).¹⁸⁶

LaRondelle considers that the understanding according to which the judgment of the harlot takes place *after* the plagues provoke the “detachment of end-time Babylon from actual history.” According to him, this is based on “the false premise that chapter 17 follows chronologically chapter 16.” Thus, he defends that Revelation 17-18 are “a further elaboration of the sixth and seventh plague.”¹⁸⁷ It will be considered in the following discussion if chapters 17 and 18 are really an elaboration of the seventh one also or only of the sixth one. He adds that “the narrative of the seven last plagues must, therefore, be interpreted through the correlated section of Revelation 19:11-21:8 with its twofold theme of requital and reward.” The correlation finds expression in the seventh plague by the divine voice from the throne, “It is done!” (16:17), “when the wrath of God destroys Babylon.” And once again by the same

¹⁸⁶ The sanctuary’s introductory scenes have been discussed by the scholars. Kenneth A. Strand defends eight basic visions as introduction to the eight groups of seven elements. He considers Revelation 16:18-17 as a sanctuary vision as well as 19:1-10, besides 1:10-20; 4:1-5:14; 8:2-6; 11:19; 15:1-16:1; and 21:5-11 (see Kenneth A. Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Book I [Silver Springs, MA: Biblical Research Institute, 1992], 107-121; and “The ‘Victorious-Introduction Scenes’ in the Visions in the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 25 [1987]: 267-288). Davidson and Paulien discard Revelation 16:18-17 to maintain only seven groups of visions (Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” 112-115; and Jon Paulien, “Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Book I, ed. Frank B. Holbrook [Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992]: 187-188; Jon Paulien, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 33.2 [1995]: 247-255). The problem with this arrangement is that Revelation 19:1-10 does not display a vision or mention on Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly temple, but only a celebration there as others in the book (see Rev 7:9-12; 11:15-18; 14:1-3; 15:2-4). By other side, Revelation 16:17 has a suggestion to the heavenly ministry with the statement “It is done!” from the throne.

¹⁸⁷ Hans K. LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Book II (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 154.

voice “It is done!” (21:6) from the throne at the descending of the New Jerusalem on the earth.¹⁸⁸ Thus, the events of judgments in Revelation 16:1-21:6 are enveloped by the statement that the seven bowls fulfil the whole wrath of God (15:1) and the two “It is done!” that confirm this completion in two phases. First, God bestows his wrath on the wicked world, and after he renews his creation. Murphy says that “the bowl series begins and ends with references to the temple (16:1, 17), framing the bowls and making it clear that their origin is God.”¹⁸⁹

It is useful also to consider that the textual connections and thematic interdependence between the bowls account in Revelation 16 and Revelation 12-19 is very broad. Firstly, Revelation 13:16-17 report the campaign of the “image of the beast” to “mark” the people of the world with the beast’s mark. Revelation 14:9-10 warn the world to not “receive the mark” neither to “worship the beast” because those who do that will “drink the cup of God’s wrath.” Then Revelation 16 shows this wrath being bestowed on those “who have the mark of the beast.” Revelation 19:20 and 20:4 retakes the issue by saying that those who received the “mark of the beast” were deceived and will be destroyed.

Secondly, the other group who are not affected by the bowls are described as “those who have the victory over the beast” and “over his mark” (Rev 15:2). They are also those who can’t buy because don’t have the “mark” in Revelation 13:17. In Revelation 12:17 this same group is persecuted by the dragon because they “keep the commandments of God.” They are the “called, chosen, and faithful” in Revelation 17:14, and the armies of the Lord of lords “clothed in fine linen, white and clear” in Revelation 19:14.

¹⁸⁸ LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” 146.

¹⁸⁹ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 346.

Thirdly, the “kings of the earth” (16:14), gathered by the three demons, enter into “war” (Greek noun πόλεμον) in the “great day of God Almighty,” the battle of Armageddon. Probably this “war” is the same referred to in Revelation 12:17 (with the Greek noun πόλεμον) by the part of the dragon against the “remnant.”¹⁹⁰ This may be the same “war” perpetrated by the beast and the kings of the earth against the Lamb and his elected in Revelation 17:14 (πολεμήσουσιν, from the verb πολεμέω). The same event seems to be depicted in Revelation 19:19 when the “beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies” are “gathered” (συνηγμένα, from συνάγω, the same Greek verb used in Rev 16:14, 16) to make “war” (Greek noun πόλεμον) against the rider on the white horse. Besides, the definitive article before “battle” (τὸν πόλεμον, in 16:16; cf. 19:19) may indicate that this is one and the same battle already mentioned without article in 12:17. Aune recalls that, since in Revelation 16:16 the “battle” is articular (τὸν πόλεμον), it “suggests that a well-known battle is in view,” that is “the great messianic battle of the end time.”¹⁹¹

This same wording makes the connections apparent and indicates that Revelation 12-19 is to be taken as a textual and thematic unity. This whole textual unity (Rev 12-19) is focused in the very last battle of Armageddon as the battle that divides the peoples of the earth in those who worship the true God and those who have the mark of the beast and worship him. This very battle clearly resembles the Elijah’s battle at Mount Carmel.

¹⁹⁰ Stefanovic says that “the concluding statement of Revelation 12:17, referring to the war against ‘the remaining ones of her springs,’ is developed in chapters 13-14” (Ranko Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 13/1 [Springs 2002]: 2).

¹⁹¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 896. Aune thinks that “while it is difficult to determine if this is eschatology or history, the phrase ‘day of judgment’ means the day on which God defeats the enemies of his people, presumably in battle” (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 896).

In this textual setting, it is interesting to notice that in Revelation 17, there is a clear chronological order of events in the angel's explanation to John that encompasses almost all the history. This order of events places the judgment of the harlot as the first one of the seven judgments (Rev 17-20) already mentioned. In his explanation of the vision, the angel says that the heads of the beast represent "seven kings," of whom "five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come" (17:9-10). The angel's explanation is to be understood as historical and given in the time of the prophet.¹⁹² In doing that, the angel establishes a clear time-history from the ancient five kings prior to Rome, the very Rome, and the further papal Rome in John's future. From 17:11-14, the angel talks about an eighth king to come after papal Rome, also in future, as part of the beast. And, then, he states that the beast (thus, the eighth king) and the ten kings (his allies) will make "war" against the Lamb (17:14). Meanwhile, he explains that the "waters" are peoples and multitudes (17:15). Finally, he states that the beast (the eighth king) and the ten kings will "hate" the harlot and "burn her with fire" (17:16). This clear chronological order places the destruction of the harlot (the first of the seven judgments) by the very hands of the beast and the kings, who were her supporters/lovers, *after* their war against the Lamb and the elected. This chronological order suggests also that their "hate" against the harlot results from their defeat in the "war" against the Lamb and the "elected" in Revelation 17:14.¹⁹³ Therefore, the beast and the kings will hate and destroy the harlot,

¹⁹² As part of the prophetic vision, the explanations by angels and others supporters are given "in the time of the prophet" (Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 214, 215; see also Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* [Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor, 1979], 54). The use of verb tenses in Daniel provides a basis for this principle (see Dan 2:31-35, 36-44; 7:1-15, 16-27; 8:3-12, 13-14, 19-25; 9:25-27). Except when he identifies the symbols as the represented entities ("those great beasts, which are four, are four kings," Dan 7:17), he uses the future tense consistently ("which shall arise out of the earth," Dan 7:17).

¹⁹³ From his preterist viewpoint, Aune says "there is a striking problem in composition here in that the Lamb destroys the armies of the ten allied kings before they are depicted as destroying Rome

perhaps because their defeat by the Lamb and his elected will expose her guilt and condemnation.

Therefore, it has many evidences that there is a textual and thematic unity in Revelation 12-19 which deals about only one battle, that is the final Armageddon. The connections between chapters 16 and 17 highlight that the order of the events about the kings in war against God Almighty may be placed as follows: (1) The demons gather the kings to make war against God. (2) The kings are completely defeated in this war. Because that (3) they hate the harlot (that is, the spirits who gathered them together against the Lamb) and destroy her. What is not so clear yet is why the account about the work of the demonic spirits (16:13-14) is reported *after* the report of the sixth bowl (16:12). We want to clarify this textual issue in the following discussion.

The Seven Last Plagues

The account of the last seven plagues (Rev 16) resembles the Egyptians plagues and the deliverance of God's people from the hands of Pharaoh. Revelation 15:2 recalls the scene of the Red Sea by depicting the faithful on the "sea of glass mingled with fire." The work of the three demons (Rev 16:13, 14) is reported in a clear intertext narrative with Egyptian magicians who tried to falsify the works of God performed by Moses.

The battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16; 19:19) is sometimes seen as retaking the attempt of Pharaoh and his cavalry to keep the Israelites in Egypt that was the way of their defeat by the Lord under the waters of the Red Sea (Exod 14:8-10, 26-28). This comparison

in v. 16. Even though this is a future event, the chronological order of the vision is disturbed" (David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52c [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998], 953).

has its benefits but also its limitations. John is not repeating Exodus' account as his intertext, but creating a new text by using some fragments of this Old Testament narrative.

The order, grouping, and the nature of the plagues in these two narratives can help us to understand the final plagues in a proper way. One needs to realize the Old Testament intertext but without reproducing it forcedly in John's text. The typology methodology uses to do that.

As it was said before, the battle of Armageddon and the resulting death of the beast and the kings of the earth (Rev 16:16; 19:19, 20) *seems* to recall the event of the Red Sea, when the Pharaoh and his army and horsemen died in the waters. LaRondelle says "because Armageddon prophecy is the dramatic culmination of the seven last plagues, it is useful to consider their typological connection with the plague-judgments on Egypt." The plagues on Egypt culminated with the death of all the Egyptian firstborns and their livestock. Yahweh said that would bring judgment on the land of Egypt and all her gods (Exod 12:12). Israel would be preserved from death by applying the blood of the Passover lamb as a sign to their doorposts (Exod 12:13).¹⁹⁴

LaRondelle also sees the event at the Red Sea as a kind of *type* for the last battle in Revelation. Sometimes, he seems to consider the onslaught of the beast and the kings against God's people (Rev 17:14; 19:19) from the attempt of the Pharaoh to attack the Israelites after the death of the firstborns. This comparison suggests that, after the seven last plagues, the evil forces of the earth would gather strengths to attacks the faithful and the Lamb at the very Parousia when they will be defeated by Christ. LaRondelle says, "Egypt's final threat to Israel occurred, however, at the Red Sea. Here Yahweh intervened for Israel as her divine warrior by

¹⁹⁴ LaRondelle, "Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues," 380.

casting Pharaoh's chariots and his army into the turbulent sea (Exod 14)." After that victory, Moses sang with Israel these famous words of promise: "The Lord [Yahweh] is a warrior; the Lord [Yahweh] is his name" (Exod 15:3; cf. Ps 24:8-10).

Based on this typology, LaRondelle concludes that the last battle is fought only by God, not by the faithful as took place at the Red Sea. According to him, the Exodus redemption is seen in the Old Testament theology as "an act of *Yahweh War*, usually called 'holy war' in the Christian tradition." He concludes, "just as the historic triumph of Yahweh over Egypt's army at the Red Sea finalized God's plague-judgments on Israel's archenemy," at the same manner "Armageddon is presented in Revelation as the final plague-judgment of God and the last war of Christ against His enemies."¹⁹⁵

This reasoning takes the intertextual or narrative connections between the texts by the typology methodology as if the new text reproduces exactly the Old Testament text or event. However, as we have seen in the first chapter, intertextuality is sometimes reproduction of the old text, sometimes with new meanings, and sometimes deployment and recreation. The problem with typology methodology is the attempt to reproduce the exact order of events and the very events in the New Testament as if the texts are just repeating the Old Testament. This makes the history seems to be cyclical and repetitive. However, as the human beings act differently by their choices, the events are also open in time.

After that comparison, however, LaRondelle goes on to say that Revelation explains that Armageddon will be "the final showdown between end-time Babylon and Israel's Messiah." According to him, this "dynamic symbolism should not lead us to overlook the concrete reality that the kings or political powers will wage war on the 'the Lamb' by

¹⁹⁵ LaRondelle, "Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues," 380.

persecuting and ultimately outlawing the faithful followers of Christ here *on earth* (12:17; 13:15-17).” Therefore, he defends *here* that Armageddon has to do with the persecution of the evil forces of the world against the faithful that is better described in Revelation 13:11-17, in the context of the mark of the beast and, thus, before the seven last bowls. Finally, he says that “the climax of this unholy war [Armageddon] in human history is the *prelude* to God’s holy war of the seven last plagues.”¹⁹⁶ Here he means that Armageddon as the war of the world in persecuting the faithful of God precedes the last plagues.

However, in dealing with the intertextual narrative between Exodus and Revelation, one needs to consider the limitation of this typology and comparison. Before taking the two narratives about the battles by putting them together in order to get an order of the events in Revelation, it is necessary to remember that the order of eschatological plagues is completely different of the order in Egyptian plagues, as we have mentioned. There is no parallel among them in terms of number and sequence, which makes difficult any sequence or order based in this typology or comparison in Revelation. The pouring of the *first* bowl on the *earth* in Revelation recalls the *sixth* Egyptian plague (Exod 9:10-11). The second and third in Revelation recall together the first one in Egypt.¹⁹⁷ The fifth one recalls Egyptians’ ninth. The other ones have no reference in Egypt (see the chart below).¹⁹⁸ Besides, in Revelation the metaphor of the drying up of waters takes place *during* the bowls, at the sixth (Rev 16:12), and not *after* them as in Exodus. Thus, the drying up of the waters in Exodus experience marks the

¹⁹⁶ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” 378; italics mine.

¹⁹⁷ The pouring out of the third bowl is followed by a “liturgical interlude” (16:5-6); the “angel of the waters” sings that the Holy One is just in his judgment (15:3-4) (Knight, *Revelation*, 119).

¹⁹⁸ cf. Krodell, *Revelation*, 282.

defeat of Pharaoh and his armies *after* the plagues, but in Revelation it marks the defeat of the enemies but *during* and *through* the plagues.

Plagues in Egypt (Exod 7-11)	Last Plagues (Rev 16)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Blood 2. Frogs 3. Lice 4. Swarms 5. Pestilence 6. Boils 7. Hail 8. Locusts 9. Darkness 10. Death of the firstborn <p style="text-align: center;">Drying up of Red Sea waters (<i>after</i>)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boils/sore/leprosy 2. Blood in sea 3. Blood in water fountains 4. Sun like fire 5. Darkness on the beast throne 6. Drying of Euphrates waters (<i>during</i>) 7. It is done!

Although that typology seems plausible, it should be considered that the defeat of the forces represented by waters take place in the sixth bowl, not after the bowls. Besides, as it was said before, the order of the events in Revelation and Exodus are completely different. There is no correspondence among the plagues in Exodus and in Revelation that could support such an order of events, unless only in general terms. Thus, that should warn us about deriving an order of the last events from the Exodus' report and conclude that Armageddon would be fight after the plagues.

Besides the resemblance between the bowls in Revelation and in Egypt, the similarities between the bowls and the trumpets is also suggestive. As it was said before, the two groups of angels with the trumpets and the bowls proceed from different places from heavenly temple (Rev 8:2; 16:5-6). The bowl plague seems to be total in its effects, when it is said, "every living creature ... died" (16:3). Instead, under the trumpets only a part is affected, "a third part

of the living creatures ... died" (8:9). The first four trumpets are given in symbolic language (Rev 8:1-12), but humanity is affected. In Revelation 8:13, it is said, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of trumpets of the three angels who are about to sound." Thus, it is "better to understand the trumpets and bowls as separate judgments."¹⁹⁹ In addition, a more "substantive uniqueness of the bowls judgments is that they are more intense and universal than the trumpets."²⁰⁰ Stefanovic considers the trumpets as divine judgments in history and still with mercy because the intercession is still in course at heavenly temple. However, the last plagues are eschatological and has no longer mercy because the intercession is not available anymore.²⁰¹

Aune recalls that "seven" is frequently used as a "structuring device" in Revelation. He defends that Revelation has three heptads ("a series of seven," or septets). They are seven seals (6:1-8:1), seven trumpets (8:9-9:21; 11:15-18), and seven bowls (15:1-16:21).²⁰² Aune groups those seven elements of the seals in "two subgroups of four (6:1-8) and three (6:9-17; 8:1)." The same he does with the trumpets. "A similar 4 + 3 structures is found in the trumpets visions (8:2-9:21; 11:15-18)."²⁰³ Stefanovic, in a similar manner, says that "the recapitulative parallels between the seals and the trumpets series appear to be evident." First of all, "both the trumpets and the seals are arranged in groups of four and three." And then, "both the series are

¹⁹⁹ Johnson, "Revelation," 549.

²⁰⁰ Yattes, *Revelation*, 285.

²⁰¹ See Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 288, 481-82.

²⁰² Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 392.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

interrupted by interludes between the six and the seventh trumpet and seal, respectively.” He concludes that “the seals and the trumpets presumably cover the entire Christian age.”²⁰⁴

Since those three cycles of visions (seals, trumpets, and bowls) are grouped by literary devices and by the fact they are “numbered visions,” we might find more literary connections among them. Those connections could be very helpful in understanding the setting of Armageddon.

Johnson highlights that the first four bowls in Revelation have to do with nature but with direct effects on human beings. The first bowl is poured upon the “earth” and produces “loathsome sore” on men (Rev 16:2). That recalls the sixth plague of boils on Egyptians under Moses (Exod 9:10-11). Johnson understands that perhaps “loathsome sore” might be translated as “malignant sore.” The second bowl turns the “sea” into polluted blood which is essential to the environment and life (Rev 16:3). The third bowl affects the “river and springs of water” (16:4) which are “essential to human life” (cf. Exod 7:17-21). The fourth bowl increases the “intensity of the sun’s heat.”²⁰⁵ It is interesting to notice here that the language used by depicting the four first plagues is that they are poured upon “earth,” “sea,” “springs,” and “sun” (Rev 16:2-9).

Similarly, Lupieri highlights that the trumpets afflicted “earth,” “sea,” “rivers and springs,” and “sun ... moon ... and stars” in this order (Rev 8:7-12). By their turn, the plagues poured out from the bowls reach “earth,” “sea,” “rivers and springs,” and “sun.” The main difference is that “when the ‘plagues’ reach these parts of the world they afflict living beings and in particular ‘men,’ wither explicitly, in the case of the first and fourth, implicitly, in the

²⁰⁴ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 28-29.

²⁰⁵ Johnson, “Revelation,” 549-550.

case of the third, while the second plague afflicts ‘every living soul ... in the soul’.” Moreover, all of the beings reached by the plagues “are afflicted,” while only “the third part” died at the second of the trumpets (with the exception of “all green grass,” in 8:7). “This difference in the objects and in the intensity of the suffering indicates that the situation is worsening” from the trumpets to the bowls.²⁰⁶ Accordingly, Krodel highlights that “the bowl cycle parallels and intensifies the destruction caused by trumpet cycle.” Both cycles are depicted by the same language on the first four plagues that afflict the earth, the sea, the sweet water, and the heavenly bodies (see Rev 8:7-13; 16:2-9).

The next two (fifth and sixth) deal with powers of enemies in warlike images (Rev 9; 16:10-16). The Euphrates River plays a role in the sixth plague of each series. Krodel highlights that “between the sixth and the seventh in each series we find an interlude, which in the bowl series is rather short.”²⁰⁷ Finally, both the seventh trumpet and bowl are accompanied by loud voices in heaven, followed by the proclamation of the reign of God and his Messiah on earth (11:15) and of the completion of his wrath, “It is done!” (16:17). “Both conclude with lightning, thunder, earthquake, and hail (11:19; 16:18).”²⁰⁸

The Three Numbered Heptads

The initial comparison between the two cycles of plagues in literary terms shows that the number is the same and the seven elements are organized in a similar order, diversely than the last bowls and Egyptian’s plagues that have different number and order.

²⁰⁶ Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 237.

²⁰⁷ Krodel, *Revelation*, 280.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

That comparison between the two numbered cycles of plagues (trumpets and bowls) should be followed by the comparison among them and the third also numbered cycle of seals. In this way, we can realize that the first four seals are connected by the use of horses (Rev 6:2-7), and the fifth and sixth ones by the mention to the martyrs and their persecutors, the kings of the earth (6:9-17). Thus, the seals are grouping in four, two, and one. Morris calls attention for the fact that “the final seal stands apart from all the rest,” and it is kept back until 8:1, because the interlude of chapter 7. Besides, the seventh seal “ushers in the next series of visions.” Besides, he states that, “we shall find this pattern of *four*, *two*, and *one* repeated with the trumpets and the bowls.”²⁰⁹ Since the three heptads (seals, trumpets, and bowls) are thus literary connected, and the first heptad has this feature in separating the last one from the others, we should observe if that feature is repeated in the others and how it can help us to understand the packed together.

Since the three heptads can be grouped in *four*, *two*, and *one*, this may be very useful in understanding the meaning of the sixth and seventh bowls plagues in Revelation 16.²¹⁰ Usually the commentators see the sixth and the seventh bowls connected in terms that both have to do with Babylon because the statement that “the great city was divided into three parts” and that the “great Babylon was remembered before God to give her cup” of divine wrath (Rev 16:19). And they grouped them as *four*, and *three*. But this grouping ignores the literary similarities among the three numbered heptads.

²⁰⁹ Morris, *Revelation*, 100, italics mine.

²¹⁰ Stefanovic defends that only “the trumpets and seals are arranged in groups of four, two, and one. Also, both series are interrupted by interludes” (Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns in Revelation,” 3).

In observing the narrative, first of all, it is possible to notice that a second group of plagues (fifth and sixth) is over Babylon. The fifth one brings darkness over the throne of the “beast” which is part of Babylon complex in Revelation 17 (see v. 3, 9), and the sixth one dries up the waters of Babylon (16:12; 17:1, 15). But the report of the seventh one only makes the declaration “It is done!” After that what the text present may be not exactly a plague, but only a theophany. See the chart in comparing the seals, trumpets, and bowls, and the theophanies after them:

Seals (6:1-17; 8:1-6)	Trumpets (8:7-9:21; 11:15-19)	Bowls (16:1-21)
1. white horse	1. earth	1. earth
2. red horse	2. sea	2. sea
3. black horse	3. springs	3. springs
4. yellow horse	4. sun, moon, and stars	4. sun
5. altar	5. darkness from abyss	5. darkness over the throne of the beast
6. sun, moon, stars	6. Euphrates	6. Euphrates
<i>Interlude (ch. 7)</i>	<i>Interlude (ch. 10-11)</i>	<i>Interlude (16:13-16)</i>
7. silence in heaven	7. voices in heaven	7. voice in heaven
Temple vision (8:2-6)	Temple vision (11:19)	Temple vision (16:19)
Theophanies: noises, thunderings, lightnings, earthquake (8:5)	Theophanies: lightnings, noises, thunderings, earthquake, great hail (11:19)	Theophanies: noises, thunderings, lightnings, earthquake, great hail (16:18, 21)

Thus, there is no apparent similarities in terms of language or symbols among the seals cycle and the others two, except that the sixth seal has elements of language in common to the others two heptads. But the structure in terms of groups is the same.²¹¹

²¹¹ Stefanovic agrees that “the seven trumpets and the seven bowl plagues series are deliberately paralleled in terms of their language and content” (Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns in Revelation,” 4).

Besides, the final account is very similar. It should be highlighted that the temple vision in 8:2-6 makes the room for the next heptad cycle, and it is followed by theophanies. The temple vision in 11:19 makes room for the unnumbered cycle of the signs (12-14), and it is followed as well as for theophanies adding the “great hail.” Finally, a *temple vision* in 16:19 (“Babylon is remembered *before* God”) also makes room for the next set of visions (17-20) and it is also followed by theophanies with a slight variation in order (first noises than lightnings). Yattes highlights that “these climatic words [‘It is done!’] are followed by flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and violent earthquake. These elements accompany the seventh seal (8:5) and trumpets (11:19).”²¹²

The temple vision in Revelation 4-5 also mentions theophanic signs (4:5), and it makes room for the next cycle of visions as well, on the seals. Indeed, there is a progression throughout these four theophanies. In 4:5, it is mentioned only three signs. In 8:5, four signs. In 11:19, five signs. And in 16:18, 21 are mentioned five signs, but with a clear intensification. These progression and intensification in the theophanic signs seem to announce the approaching and arriving of God’s presence to the earth as the visions are revealing. Murphy notices that “each element of the storm theophany in the seventh trumpet (11:19) is taken up again in the seventh bowl” (see 16:18; cf. also 4:5; 8:5). “Hail and thunder together recall the seventh Exodus’ plague (Exod 9:13-35).”²¹³ Revelation 16:18, 21 repeats Revelation 11:19 textually. See chart below:

²¹² Yattes, *Revelation*, 298.

²¹³ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 346.

Rev 4:5	Rev 8:5	Rev 11:19	Rev 16:18, 21
ἐκπορεύονται ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ	ἐγένοντο βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός.	ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη.	ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ... καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη.

If this literary pattern is taken in consideration, the theophanies in Revelation 16:18, 21 are not part of the seventh bowl plague, but only theophanic signs that mark the divine presence in judgment like in 8:5 and 11:19. If one should consider them as events on the earth (as the seventh plague), the others signs in 4:5; 8:5; 11:19 are to be seen so as well. However, this is not the case. Stefanovic says that the “flashes of lightning, sounds, and peals of thunder issuing from the throne (Rev 4:5) ... accentuate the splendor of that occasion,” having theophanic meaning.²¹⁴

That literary arrangement among the seals, trumpets, and bowls indicate that we need to group them all in *four*, *two*, and *one*. Besides, it is clear also that the seventh one in the three heptads is distinguished from the six previous.

Although Resseguie defends a linear reading of the heptads (or septets) of visions in Revelation, in arguing on this point, he provides a clear understanding of the literary connections on the eschatological events involved in the three series of prophetic visions of

²¹⁴ Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 59.

the seals, trumpets, and bowls.²¹⁵ According to him, in cyclical perspective the seventh element is very crucial.

The most convincing part of the theory lies in the last two visions of the septet. The sixth seal, trumpet, and bowl *judgment* are shattering catastrophes that appear to signal the arrival of the end of the age. At the opening of the sixth seal, cosmic devastation occurs (6:12-14). At the blowing of the sixth trumpet, 200 million troops kill a third of humanity. And at the pouring out of the sixth bowl, the great eschatological battle of Armageddon (Harmagedon) occurs. *The seventh in the series signals the arrival of the end.* This is more noticeable in the seventh trumpet and seventh bowl than in the seventh seal. With the blowing of the seventh trumpet loud voices in heaven proclaim that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah” (11:15). And at the pouring out of the seventh bowl, a loud voice from the temple says, “It is done!” (16:17).²¹⁶

Scholars from different perspectives see the theophanic elements as signs of divine presence and acts of judgments. Thomas considers that the indirect reference to the throne in Revelation 16:17 (“before God”) and the display of the theophanic elements point the attention back to 4:5, “where these elements are first recounted in the Apocalypse.” He adds that the display of the theophanic elements reminds of the “way in which the sequence” of seven bowls is connected to the “seven seals” and “seven trumpets,” since the theophanic elements accompany the “conclusion of each sequence with each being more intense than the one that comes before.”²¹⁷ Murphy says that “thunder is usually associated with the divine presence,” as in chapter 4.²¹⁸ Custer recalls that “the lightning, voices, thunder, and earthquake

²¹⁵ James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 56-59.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56; italics mine.

²¹⁷ John Christopher Thomas, *The Apocalypse: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 487.

²¹⁸ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 203-204.

were all signs at the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16-18).²¹⁹ Krodel adds that “this great earthquake connects the seventh bowl with the sixth seal (6:12) which has introduced the day of the Lord in the seal septet.”²²⁰ Finally, LaRondelle reminds that “the Bible writers regularly describe God’s presence by way of earthquake, thunder, phenomena in the sun, moon, and stars, torrents of rain and hail, and especially by sending paralyzing terror and panic among Israel’s assailants (Exod 15:16; Deut 7:20, 23).” He concludes, “these are manifestations of Yahweh’s theophanic presence.”²²¹ In this perspective, the theophanic elements are not to be taken necessarily as “events” resulting of the seventh bowl, but only as signs in the vision like usually they are understood in 8:5 and 11:19.

In Revelation 16:20, the theophanic elements common to the seals and trumpets are added with the moving of mountains and islands. Aune says that the motif of the disappearance of mountains is often connected in the Old Testament and early Judaism with a “theophany or the eschatological judgment, conceptions that tend to merge.”²²²

The reported reaction of men before the “hail” in Revelation 16:21 seems to indicate that the seventh bowl really affects people, instead being only the declaration “It is done!” followed by theophanies. However, it should be noticed that the statement, “Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail” may be seen as summary of the evil’s reaction before all the bowls, since it repeats the reaction already reported at the fourth and fifth bowls (16:9,

²¹⁹ Stewart Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise: A Commentary on Revelation* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2004), 181.

²²⁰ Krodel, *Revelation*, 288.

²²¹ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 60-61.

²²² Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 901. See, for example, Ps 97:5; Isa 2:12-18; 40:4; 42:15; 54:10; Ezek 38:20; 1 Eno 1:6-7; 4 Ezra 15:42

11). Resseguie comes to suggest that if we take the reaction of men before the “hail” (16:21) as if this would be result of a plague, we should take the others mentions to “hail” in Revelation as a plague as well, like those in Revelation 8:5 and 11:19, and even the “lightning and thunders” in 4:5.²²³ Aune agrees that the statement that “the people reviled God as the result of the plague of hail” (Rev 16:21) is a repetition in “slightly varied language of the human response to the fourth plague in v. 9 and the fifth plague in v. 11.”²²⁴ In this case, the scene in Revelation 16:18-21 functions as a conclusion on the bowls plagues and make room for the next visions, as do the others sanctuary scenes.²²⁵

Yattes recalls that “as the result of the earthquake, the great city was split into three parts” (Rev 16:19).²²⁶ Therefore, if we consider the earthquake as literal, in dealing with the theophanies as literal events, we would consider the split of the city as literal event as well. In this case, the literal earthquake would affect a literal city. However, the great city is further identified as Babylon the Great, which an angel already pronounced “fallen” (14:8), and this fall occurs at the sixth plague. Besides, Babylon is not a literal city like Rome in the end time.

Since we consider the theophanies in Revelation 16:17-21 as signs of divine presence and glory as in Revelation 8:5 and 11:19, the set of the bowls can be grouped as the trumpets and seals in *four*, *two* and *one*. In this grouping the seventh one is single and has no content in terms of God’s work as the previous ones.

²²³ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 210.

²²⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 902.

²²⁵ Cf. Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns in Revelation.”

²²⁶ Yattes, *Revelation*, 299.

It should be noticed that, although there are seven heptads in Revelation, only three of them are numbered. Those heptads recall the creation report in Genesis 1 and 2 where the days are also numbered as “first day,” “second day”... and “seventh day.” In creation God does work every day from the first one through the sixth one. However, there is no work on the seventh day. In dealing with literary device in Revelation, one should consider that the seventh seal reports only a “silence” in heaven (8:1). The seventh trumpet is also empty in terms of work-judgment because it only reports a celebration in heaven (11:16-17). Following this pattern, the third numbered heptad (the seven bowls) is to be seen as the previous ones, and in the seventh element there is more work to do. In this line, the seventh element is empty in terms of work, like the Sabbath of the seventh day at creation in Genesis. Therefore, the grouping of the bowls is to be *four, two, and one*. And the last one is isolate and is not about the judgment of Babylon which has been judged and destroyed at the sixth bowl. In this case, the report in Revelation 16:18-21 is a vision that makes room for the next cycle (Rev 17-20). This cycle may be seen as a set of seven judgments, over the harlot (Rev 17-18), beast, false prophet, kings, their armies (19), the wicked, and the dragon (20). In this line, Revelation 16:18-21 concludes the bowls cycle and prepare the reader for the next cycle with the seven judgments.

Besides, in Genesis creation, the days can be grouped in *four, two and one* as well. Likely the trumpets and bowls, the first four have to do with earth, water, trees, and skies. The two following with living beings. And the last one, the seventh, is alone without any content in terms of work. God does not speak anything in the seventh day at creation; there is only “silence,” because his word is his instrument of work in creation, and there is no longer work to do at the seventh day. Likely, the trumpets and bowls employ symbols of earth, water, trees,

skies, and living beings, from the first through the sixth elements. This indicates that the reading of the seventh bowl should follow this pattern, and it should be considered alone and without any work in terms of God's deeds. John reports only the final statement from the throne saying, "It is done!," "It is complete!"

The Seventh Plague: It Is Done!

The seven plagues cycle is parallel to the seven seals and trumpets cycles. They also seem to be divided by an interlude between the sixth and the seventh one as the seals and the trumpets. The description of the three demonic spirits would be this interlude. We see that the final and last bowls seem to be empty in terms of work done by God, as occurs in the seventh seal, trumpet, and at creation in Genesis.

However, may the voice from the throne "It's done!" be considered as the end of the plagues, the final consummation of God's wrath? In this case, would be the following vision about the Babylon being remembered before God a kind transition-passage to the next visions in Revelation 17-20? The following discussion on the meaning of "It is done!" points in this direction.

Meanwhile, LaRondelle understands differently. According to him, "the Armageddon prophecy is located in the unit of the seven last plagues (Rev 16), after the description of the sixth plague (v. 16)." And the "actual battle is not described in verse 16," but it will "take place consequently during the seventh plague." In conclusion, he states, "Surprisingly, the final, or seventh, plague describes the terrifying events in nature that will accompany the second advent of Christ, with this clarification: 'God remembered Babylon the Great and gave

her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of its wrath' (16:19)."²²⁷ However, we have seen that those "terrifying events" should be seen unless as theophanies, at least in terms of the bowls of God's wrath. Indeed, LaRondelle's view is the understanding of many scholars. But the literary arrangement among the numbered visons (seals, trumpets, and bowls) place the seventh bowl as distinct from the others, and not related to Babylon judgment necessarily.

Thomas highlights that the seventh bowl is poured "into the air" (16:17), instead earth and sun like those before. He considers that the fact that the moving "from the earth itself to the air, which surround it" calls attention.²²⁸ Murphy says that "it is striking that the seventh bowl is poured out on the 'air.'" He considers that "the first four trumpets are aimed at the earth, sea, rivers and fountains, and heavily bodies, respectively." According to him, "these are traditional biblical constituents of the world (see especially Prov 8:23-24, 27, 29)."²²⁹ The mention to the "air" may suggest that this bowl does not affect necessarily the human environment.

According to Aune, the Greek natural philosophers considered the four basic elements of life are *earth* (Rev 16:2), *water* (sea, v. 3); *rivers* and *springs* (v. 4; the Euphrates, v. 12), *fire* (sun, v. 8), and *air* (v. 17). It seems that every one of them is affected by the seven last plagues. However, the throne of the beast (v. 10) is obviously missing from this schema, as he recognizes.²³⁰ Besides, it is necessary to notice that Revelation 16:1 the bowl angels are commanded to pour out their libation bowls "on the *earth*," not on the *air*. Aune also

²²⁷ LaRondelle, "Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues," 375.

²²⁸ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 486.

²²⁹ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 345.

²³⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 899.

understands that the seventh plague “is not closely related to the others.” Thus, by mentioning the *air* in contrast to the command in 16:1 “on the *earth*,” John seems to indicate that this seventh bowl is of different nature, as we have considered.

In John’s narrative, the result of this pouring out of the bowl into the air is a voice “from the temple of heaven,” “It is done!” Thomas understands that one of the first things of significance about these words is “the fact that the last seven plagues of God’s wrath have actually been completed!” With the words “It is done!,” John is telling that we are “closer than ever to the ends of all things.”²³¹ He adds that this voice “from the throne, the voice of God” at the time of the seventh and last bowl “matches the sounding of this voice at the beginning of the sequence when God instructs the seven angels with the seven bowls to pour out their bowls, indicating that the entire bowls sequence is enveloped by the voice of God.” He is at the control of the entire process. “His words indicate that their work has been accomplished and the end has arrived.” Thomas also refers to the perfect tense γέγονεν (“It is done”) indicating “a past event the results of which are felt into the present.”²³²

In this same line, Koester agrees that “God’s voice from the celestial temple initially told angels to pour out their bowls, and now God speaks again, saying, ‘It is done!,’ indicating that the plagues have reached their culmination (16:1, 17).”²³³ Beale considers the “It is done” in Revelation 16:17 as a declaration of “the final consummation of judgment.” At the same time, he refers to the “It is done” in Revelation 21:9 as the restoration of God’s creation. “There the focus is on punishment of the wicked, the destruction of the old cosmos, and the

²³¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 486.

²³² *Ibid.*, 487.

²³³ Koester, *Revelation*, 668.

complete redemption of God's people in the new creation (21:1-8)."²³⁴ Thus, the "It is done!" refers to the completion of the work of God in punishing the wicked and in rewarding his saints. Krodel purposes that the "It is done!" leads us to "the threshold of eternity," for there were "flashes of lightning, loud voices, peals of thunder," manifestation of theophany" (cf. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19).²³⁵

Custer adds that the solitary perfect tense verb "It is come to pass" (from the Greek γέγονεν) is "a divinely simple way of showing that the wrath of God has been fully accomplished, with results that will last for all eternity: the power of evil has been broken." According to him, this is a parallel to the perfect tense verb in the cry from the cross: "It has been finished" (Τετέλεσται, John 19:30), which showed that "the atoning sacrifice for sin had been fully accomplished, with results that the redeemed will dwell in heaven for all eternity." By other hand, it also anticipates the perfect tense verb in Revelation 21:6, "They have come to pass" (γέγοναν), which refers to all God's purposes for the new creation."²³⁶ Stefanovic also argues that the "It is done!" in Revelation 16:17 is a repetition of the "It is done!" of the Calvary which announced the "victory over Satan and the beginning of the time of the end (John 19:30). In this time, the same voice of Christ proclaims the conclusion of earth's history and the final victory over Satan and the powers of darkness."²³⁷ Rotz states that "like the seventh trumpet, the seventh bowl portrays the consummation of history." The loud voices from the heavenly temple in both cycles "announce the accomplishment of God's salvific

²³⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 842.

²³⁵ Krodel, *Revelation*, 288.

²³⁶ Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise*, 181.

²³⁷ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 504.

purposes” (cf. 11:15; 16:17). Because that “the judgment includes an earthquake with accompanying thunder, lighting, and hail (cf. 11:19; 16:18, 21).”²³⁸

In addition, Murphy also argues that the Greek form verb γέγονεν comes from γίνομαι which means “to be” or “to take place.” It is the same verb used in Revelation 1:19 when John is told to write down “what is to take place after this,” and in 4:1 when he is called up to heaven to be shown “what must take place after this.” Thus, the announcement in 16:17 that “It is done!” signals “the completion of what John was to be shown, and it comes from the temple and from the throne, so it is a statement of God.” He adds that God repeats the pronouncement in 21:6, “after the end-time events have been recapitulated in more details in 17:1-21:4.”²³⁹ Yattes also says that, since the loud voice is from the throne, it is God’s voice, and it “marks the end, not chronologically, but in the sense of completion: God’s justice is complete (11:17-18),” and from now on there will be no more plagues of wrath.²⁴⁰

However, since the heavenly statement “It is done!” is to be seen as the consummation of God’s works in terms of wrath, why does John in sequence talk about the remembering of Babylon to give her the cup of God’s wrath in Revelation 16:19?

Aune agrees that the “It is done!” (16:17) reiterates the summary in Revelation 15:1, which allows the conclusion that with these seven bowls the wrath of God is finished.

²³⁸ Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the New Testament* (Kansas, AK: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 243.

²³⁹ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 346, italics mine.

²⁴⁰ Yattes, *Revelation*, 298. Rotz adds that “the message ‘It is done!’ (γέγονεν; lit., ‘It is become!’) recalls Jesus’ victorious words on the cross, ‘It is finished!’ (John 19:30). It also summarizes the purpose of the bowls (15:1) as the consummation of God’s wrath. God’s judgment, which is always active in history and will finally be completed at the end of history, is based on Jesus’ triumph over sin” (Rotz, *Revelation*, 243).

However, he argues, “if the wrath of God has ended, it remains unclear why Babylon is the focus of 17:1-18:24.” The perfect tense of γέγονεν, “it is finished,” suggests a “contrast with the previous use of aorist tenses and points to the climatic end of the series of plagues that God has inflicted on the world.”²⁴¹ Since Aune does not accept the recapitulation principle to explain the structure of Revelation, he sees the sequence of the visions in Revelation 17 and the followings as a difficult problem.

Osborne adds that the voice of God proclaims the eschaton in “electrifying simplicity” by stating with finality, γέγονεν, “It has happened,” “It is over.” He also remembers that this statement recalls “was put in motion when Christ cried from the cross, ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30).” He still adds that “since the perfect tense (as here) is often used to stress the state of affairs resulting from an action, this means that the judgment of God has already occurred, and we are at the end of history.” According to him, in Revelation 16:19, “It is done” means that “the time for judgment is at an end, and God’s final kingdom has arrived.”²⁴²

However, Osborne finds one difficulty. He says, “In one sense this is difficult to uphold, since the storm theophany ‘happen’ (ἐγένοντο) in 16:18, but the events of 16:18-21 are a single whole, and so 16:17 is saying that they end the judgment of God and introduce the conclusion to the present age.” Before this striking literary challenge, Osborne says that “we must remember that the Apocalypse is *cyclical*” and “the fall of Babylon the Great in chapters 17-18 plays out the same judgments” as those in bowls. Therefore, this cyclical device of John’s narrative “does not contradict the cry ‘It is over’ here.”²⁴³ Murphy also concludes that

²⁴¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 899.

²⁴² Osborne, *Revelation*, 597, italics mine.

²⁴³ Ibid.

“the fact that Revelation continues for another six chapters does not negate the finality of the statement in 16:17, for what follows *recapitulates* what goes before.”²⁴⁴

Since the judgments set has been fulfilled with the statement “It is done!,” what does mean that God remembered Babylon to give her the cup of his wrath? As we have seen before, the signs in heaven should be seen as theophanies, and the passage in Revelation 16:18-21 may be considered as a text-transition to the next section of visions.

Babylon Remembered Before God

When and why God remembers Babylon in Revelation is an important question in dealing with Revelation 16:19. The answer is to be provided for the literary context of Revelation 12-19.

The statement about God remembering something calls for intercession before his throne by using the altar of incense (Rev 8:3-4). The Greek expression used in Revelation 16:19 is ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, “before God.” The preposition ἐνώπιον is used 35 times in Revelation. Six times it is used as ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (“before God”) indicating the very place of the temple where it is the altar of incense (cf. 8:2, 4), the holy place (cf. 8:2, 4; 9:13; 11:4; 11:16; 12:10; 16:19). It is used as ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου (“before the throne”) indicating the same place because God is seated on the throne (cf. 1:4; 4:5, 6, 10, 7:9, 11, 15; 8:3,14:3; 20:12). And others twice as ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου (“before the Lamb”) since the Lamb has been enthroned at the hand of God from 5:1-14 (cf. 7:9; 14:10). This same preposition ἐνώπιον is also used about the “two witness.” “These are the two olive trees and the two lampstand that

²⁴⁴ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 346, italics mine.

stand *before* the Lord of the earth” (Rev 11:4). The reference here is of course to the lampstand which is part of the holy place in the temple.

Therefore, that the Babylon “was remembered before God” results from the intercession in favor of the martyrs, and God takes in account her sins to punish her, as we see at the sixth bowl which according to Revelation 17 and 18 depicts the fall of Babylon. Rotz adds that the passive Greek construction ἐμνήσθη ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, literally “it was remembered before God,” where the verb means to “be aware of information and to act appropriately” suggests “a trial before God’s throne.”²⁴⁵

The idea that Revelation 17-18 depict the further event of punishment on Babylon supposedly only announced in Revelation 16:19 (“God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath”) is based on the notion that a sequential reading is to be done through these chapters, a reading we have seen is not the case.

Besides, the indicative aorist passive Greek verbal form ἐμνήσθη (from μμνήσκω) in 16:19 is better translate as “it was remembered” (NKJV). The verbal form ἐμνήσθη is followed by the infinitive aorist δοῦναι (from δίδωμι) which may be understood as “gave” (NVI), in past time. Therefore, the statement may be seen as a summary of the previous plagues’ events. It is like that God was remembered of Babylon in the past, during the intercession ministry before his throne (8:3-4), and because this remembering he has *punished* her for her sins through the plagues. Babylon the great has been judged at the sixth bowl.

²⁴⁵ Rotz, *Revelation*, 244; cf. Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 415.

In addition, we should consider that Revelation 17 is not only about this judgment of the harlot. Indeed, this chapter has more information about the scarlet beast than the harlot and her judgment.²⁴⁶ Moreover, if the angel who shows John the judgment of the harlot (Rev 17:1) is that one who has the sixth bowl and if the waters on which the harlot sits are the same waters of the Euphrates, then chapters 17-18 is to be put *inside* the bowls account, not after that or in sequence of that.

The fact that the harlot Babylon is “remembered before God” recalls Revelation 6:10 and 8:3, when the martyrs claim for God’s judgments over their enemies and the priest intercedes for them “before God” (8:3; 9:13).²⁴⁷ The sins of Babylon judged in this context are crimes of killing of the people of God (cf. 18:20, 24; 19:2). And she is judged exactly for those sins. Revelation 19:2 reports that God “avenged on her the blood of his servants *shed* by her.” Osborne argues that “the expression suggests that the *angels* [priest] literally bring the prayers before God and remind him of the deeds of human beings (Rev 8:3-5)” in terms of the crimes of killing against the people of God.²⁴⁸

When one takes the trumpets in Revelation as divine judgments over the enemies of God’s people, and considers that the sounding of the trumpets makes God *remember*, the

²⁴⁶ “In the Greek of v. 1-6 [of Rev 17], according to Nestle’s text, 102 words are devoted to the woman and only 12 to the beast. But in the explanation (v. 7-18) the angel dwells almost altogether on the beast, together with its heads and horns. In the Greek of v. 7-18 only 36 words are devoted to the woman and 243 to the beast” (Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:853).

²⁴⁷ The expression “came in remembrance” is a “common Biblical expression denoting the arrival of the hour when divine judgment is to be meted out (Ps 109:14; Ezek 21:23, 24: cf. Jer 31:34)” (Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:847).

²⁴⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 599, italics mine, to indicate that not the angels but Christ make this intercession. Stefanovic adds that Revelation 6:9-10 finds “its fullest confirmation in 8:2-6” and also “gives the clue for the understanding of the nature and purpose of both the seven seals and seven trumpets plagues” (Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns in Revelation,” 2).

passage of Number 10:9 comes to mind. God said that when Israel went out to the war and the enemies pressed them, the priest should sound the trumpets. And then, they would be “remembered before the Lord” (Num 10:9). Therefore, the remembering “before” God that result in the punishment of Babylon is to be seen as transitory passage that makes room for the visions of Revelation 17-20.

As part of the bowls’ summary, the statement that Babylon “was divided into three parts” and that “the cities of the nations fell” (Rev 16:19) suggests that in the context of the plagues all the religious powers that dominates over the kings and nations of the earth will be destroyed. Since the “great city” is Babylon, the “cities of the nations” in the context could be her “harlot” daughters mentioned in Revelation 17:5.

In the report of the seventh bowl plague, one should notice that John uses the word “city” (Greek πόλις) for the first time in Revelation. After that he uses this word six times in chapters 17 and 18 (17:18; 18:10 [2x], 16, 19, 21) to talk about Babylon the Great. And in chapter 21 more three times (v. 16, 18, 23) to talk about the New Jerusalem. The city motif from Revelation 16:19 on requires to look ahead to chapters 17-21 and not behind to chapter 16 where the idea of “city” is absent. From this point on (16:18-21) the city motif occupies John’s attention by contrasting the two great cities and their different fates.

Thus, the setting of Armageddon in Revelation helps us to understand that this last battle is rooted in all the report from chapter 12 through 19. From Revelation 12, John talks about one single battle that is fought by the Lamb and the dragon, and their followers, respectively. The battle is referred to in a direct way inside the report of the seven last bowls, that have the complete wrath of God to be bestowed on the inhabitants of the earth who have the mark of the beast. The fact that Armageddon is reported literary inside the sixth bowl

suggest that this bowl could mark the crucial moment of the battle with the clashdown of the enemies of God's people.

The report on the bowls, in comparison to the seals and trumpets, highlights that they should be grouped in four, two, and one. This grouping allows us to realize that the seventh bowl is separate from the others and may have no effect on human beings. This is so because the seventh element in Genesis creation report, in the seals, and the trumpets is marked by the absence of divine work. Those three numbered visions recall the creation narrative in which God's work is done from the first through the sixth days, and the seventh is a moment to rest and celebration. Since God's judgments find their conclusion with the divine statement "It is done!" (Rev 16:17) what comes further is to be seen as cyclical or recapitulative narratives.

CHAPTER 4

THE FALL OF BABYLON

The sixth bowl in Revelation is depicted in a symbolic language that is familiar in the Scriptures. John says that when the sixth angel poured out his cup “on the great river Euphrates” its water “was dried up” (Rev 16:12). The event prepares the “way of the kings from the east.” This imagery needs to be understood from the context of the literary setting as we described in the last chapter and in light of the Old Testament as its intertexts.

Aune says that the drying up of rivers is a common picture to the “coming of God” (cf. Isa 50:2; Hos 13:15; Nah 1:4). He mentions the drying up of the Red Sea (Exod 14:21; cf. Isa 11:15; Jer 51:36) and of the Jordan River (Josh 3:17) to states that this imagery in Revelation 16:12 has to do with the victory of God’s people and the defeat of enemies. According to him, this picture functions as “miraculous means enabling the passage of victorious armies.”²⁴⁹

The most scholars who deal with Revelation imagery and visions consider that the drying up of waters or rivers depicts the defeat of God’s enemies. However, they consider that this defeat that marks the climax of Armageddon would take place at the seventh bowl or at Parousia instead of the sixth bowl which employs this symbolism.

In this chapter we discuss this imagery from its background in the Old Testament and its literary context in Revelation 12-19 as we have described in the last chapter.

²⁴⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 891.

The Drying up of Waters in Scriptures

The picture used to describe the sixth bowl plague is to portray the loss and mourning of the wicked at the climax of Armageddon. John mentions that the bowl plague makes the “waters” of the great river “Euphrates” dry up. This event makes room for the passing by of the “kings from the east.” Thus, the drying up of the waters seems more likely to predict the defeat of the enemies by the time of the sixth bowl plague in Revelation, instead of pointing to their “preparation” to fight against God and his people. This meaning of the drying up of waters is a common view among the interpreters.

Aune defends that the sixth plague is “unique in that the *effects* of the pouring out of the sixth bowl are not immediate, and that “this passage involves the gathering of a great army, which is briefly mentioned in the redactional passage in 17:14 and further discussed in 19:19-21.” According to his understanding, the sixth bowl deals only with the “preparations” of the armies to fight further.²⁵⁰

However, unlike a “preparation” for battle, the Biblical symbol of drying up of the waters is indicative of the defeat of the wicked and of the victory of the saints. God delivered the Israelites when the Red Sea became a “dry land” (Exod 14:21, 22). In this occasion, the Pharaoh and his army fell down before the armies of the Almighty (Ps 74:13, 14) who were the Israelites. Isaiah foresees the end of the Babylonian captivity by stating that God, with “a scorching wind,” would move his hand against the “Euphrates” to “break it” and divide it (Isa 11:15; 44:27, NIV).

Stefanovic argues that “the sudden drying up of the river Euphrates led to the collapse of the ancient Babylon” (cf. Isa 44:27-28; Jer 50:35-38; 51:36-37). In the same way the

²⁵⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 866.

symbolic drying up of “the great river Euphrates” is “preliminary to the collapse of the end-time Babylon.”²⁵¹ He understands that the next vision in Revelation 17 indicates that “the river Euphrates must be understood symbolically,” as the “many waters” in 17:1, or “nations” on which the prostitute Babylon sits on in 17:15. He recalls that in Jeremiah 51:13 the expression “many waters” on which Babylon was located is “another reference to the river Euphrates.” With this background imagery in mind, John explains that “the waters on which the prostitute Babylon sits symbolize the national powers of the world,” that is, “peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues” (Rev 17:15). These peoples “will be in service of the end-time Babylon and in opposition to God and his people.”²⁵² Stefanovic adds that in the Old Testament, the image of the drying up of waters stands for “a might action of God on behalf of his people”²⁵³ and as a way to prepare “to the gathering of God’s people and bringing them back to their land.”²⁵⁴

LaRondelle understands that an important feature of the seven last plagues is that “while four eschatological plagues find a striking correspondence to the plagues of Egypt” (waters turned into blood, Exod 7:17, 19-21; boils, Exo. 9:8-11; darkness, Exod 10:21-23), the sixth plague (Rev 16:12, 19) is obviously “borrowed from the fall of the ancient Babylon” (cf.

²⁵¹ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 497.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 493.

²⁵³ Cf. Exod 14:21-22; Josh 3:14-17; Jer 51:36; Isa 44:27.

²⁵⁴ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 493. Cf., for example, Isa. 11:15-16; 51:10-11; Zech 10:10-11. Stefanovic purposes that “the historical fulfilment of these prophecies was later recorded by the famous Greek historian Herodotus and confirmed in modern times by the Cyrus Cylinder. According to Herodotus, Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon by drying up the Euphrates River which flowed through the city. When he approached Babylon, he discovered that the walls and defenses were too strong and that the city had supplies for many years to come. Cyrus used a section of his soldiers to divert the incoming water flow of the river, when it was low, into a lake” (Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 494).

Isa 44-47; Jer 50-51).²⁵⁵ He adds that Isaiah emphasized “the certainty of Israel’s redemption from Babylon by referring to Israel’s first exodus from Egypt as the prototype for the future liberation from new oppressor, Babylon.”²⁵⁶

Resseguie mentions that the “great river Euphrates” is a symbolic river found on “John’s spiritual map” or his imagery (cf. 9:14; Gen 15:18; Deut 1:7; Josh 1:4). He recalls that, in the John’s “narrative world,” the adjective “great” links the river with the “great city” Babylon. The Euphrates is a threat, the antithesis of the “river of the water of life” (22:1). He adds that whereas the “river of the water of life” flows through the new Jerusalem and sustains the inhabitants of the eternal city, “the river Euphrates flows through the ancient city of the story and brings destruction.” In Revelation, thus, the Euphrates is dried up, allowing the kings “from the east” to cross the river and “battle the forces of good.”²⁵⁷

Aune adds that the phrase “many waters” occurs in the Old Testament, with the suggestion of “chaos and disorder that are sometimes in conflict with Yahweh and therefore are occasionally used as an equivalent to the dragon or Raab.”²⁵⁸ From this Old Testament intertextual perspective, Revelation uses an imagery to depicts the peoples of the earth as they

²⁵⁵ LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” 143.

²⁵⁶ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” 381. Cf., for example, Isa 11:10-12; 43:16-19; 51:10-11; 52:1-12; 63:11-19.

²⁵⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 213.

²⁵⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 929. Cf. Ps 18:16; 29:3; 32:6; 77:19; 93:4; 144:7; Ezek 32:13; Hab 3:15. Aune also recalls that the Euphrates, sometimes called “the river” (Deut 11:24) and “the great river” (Gen 15:18; Deut 1:7; Josh 1:4), “was one of the great natural boundaries in the ancient world” (cf. Exod 23:31; Deut 1:7; Josh 24:2; 1 Kgs 4:21; 2 Kgs 24:7; 1 Mac 3:32)” (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 890). According to Stefanovic, “the Euphrates River in the Old Testament was the boundary that separated God’s people from their enemies” (cf. Isa 7:20; Jer 46:10; Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 115).

are influenced by the dragon in supporting the harlot in her war against God's people. The dragon is one of the origins of the three demon that stand for the harlot in Revelation 17.

In this line of thought, the imagery of the drying up of waters points to dispersion and defeat of the enemies instead of their preparation and gathering for battle. The enemies are defeated and destroyed when the waters dry up in the Old Testament as the textual background to Revelation.

The Purpose for Drying up the Waters

In Revelation 16:12, John says that the water of the great river Euphrates is dried up *in order* (he uses the conjunction ἵνα, which denotes “purpose, aim, and goal”) to prepare the way for the “kings from the east.” This construction indicates that the drying up of the waters precedes or is the condition to the way of the kings is prepared. Thus, the fall of Babylon seems to be required to prepare the way for those kings. Who are those kings is a debated issue among the scholars.

From a preterist viewpoint, Yattes considers that the “most clear referent for the imagery in this passage is no doubt the expected return of Nero from the east,” according to *Nero Redivivus* myth. He adds that “because the Euphrates river protected the Roman Empire from invasion by the feared Parthians, the kings of the east probably allude to the Parthian regional rulers.”²⁵⁹ From this same perspective, Krodel and Mounce see the Parthians as background for this picture. However, they believe the kings from the east go to war against

²⁵⁹ Yattes, *Revelation*, 294. By his turn, Knight understands that sixth bowl by drying up the river Euphrates (16:12) prepare the way for the kings from the east. In his view, “this passage recalls 9:13-19 where the angels bound at the Euphrates are loosed to destroy a third of humankind. It is probably significant that the Euphrates separated the Roman Empire from the Parthians who are the best candidates for the ‘kings from the east’ in this reference” (Knight, *Revelation*, 120).

the kings of the whole world, preparing for the destruction of the unholy Roman Empire in chapters 17-18.²⁶⁰ Koester adds that in light of Nero's tradition, John's vision of the kings crossing the Euphrates suggests that "they fit the pattern of Nero by coming to destroy Babylon/Rome, which is what the kings allied the beast do in Revelation 17:12-18."²⁶¹

From a traditional historicist viewpoint, Oral Collins understands the "waters of Euphrates" as the Turkish Empire that was broken in a long process from the 19th century until 1918, and this political change prepare the way for "kings from the east" that are nations established by the "League of Nations' partition of the Ottoman territories," or "Arab Muslim nations of Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Saud Arabia, and Egypt." He adds that the "most of these lie to the East of Jerusalem, to focal point for the battle of Armageddon."²⁶²

In a futuristic perspective, Osborne sees the "kings from the east" and the "kings of the whole world" as the totality of the political power in a time without any boundaries among them to fight the last battle against God and his people.²⁶³ In a futuristic and more literal view, Custer states that "there is great agreement that the literal river Euphrates will dry up." He argues that the Old Testament prophets repeatedly prophesied that God would dry up the Euphrates, "the river" (Isa 11:15; Jer 50:35-38; 51:36; Zech 10:11). God would do this for the remnant, "the redeemed," to pass over (Isa 51:10-11). He defends the view that "the way of

²⁶⁰ See Krodell, *Revelation*, 281; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 298.

²⁶¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 665. Koester also understand that "all the kings cross the Euphrates to assemble at Harmagedon, preparing for the battle that results in their defeat in Revelation 19:11-21. As opponents of God and his people, the eastern kings are like the rulers of Assyria and Babylon, who conquered Israel and Judah." But, according to him, "their coming fulfills the prophetic expectation that many nations will fight against Israel and Jerusalem in the end times" (cf. Ezek 38-39; Joel 3; Zech 12, 14) (Koester, *Revelation*, 665).

²⁶² Oral Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus*, 376.

²⁶³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 591.

the kings of the east” is a definite prophecy of a “vast invasion by a coalition of eastern empires,” among them China, India, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Pakistan, and others. “Some kind of coalition will rebel and come against the empire of the Beast.”²⁶⁴

From an idealistic scenario, Johnson understands the reference here to the “forces of evil” in their “eschatological” defeat by the higher good.²⁶⁵ By his turn, from an eclectic perspective, Beale universalizes the imagery, by seeing “Cyrus and his allies as the kings from the east escalated into the kings of the earth (16:14) and then escalated further to God and Magog (see 20:8) to describe the woes of the whole interadvent period.”²⁶⁶

In a more literary understanding, Thomas considers difficult that the first John’s readers would not understand the drying up of Euphrates in Revelation 16 from the ancient reports about the drying up of the Red Sea (Exod 14:21-22) and the Jordan River (Josh 3:14-17). In those account, the waters were dried up in order “the people of God might pass through during the period of the Exodus and entry into the promised land, respectively.”²⁶⁷

Stefanovic takes the expression the “kings from the east” as a linguistic reference to the “famous conquest of ancient Babylon by Cyrus the Persian and his allies forces.” Cyrus is referred to by Isaiah as “God’s messiah” (cf. Isa 45:1), and he and his allies arrived to Babylon “from the rising of the sun” (Isa 41:25; 41:2; 46:11). Therefore, he states that the reference here is to “Christ,” the “King of kings and Lord of lords,” and “his armies consisting of the

²⁶⁴ Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise*, 178-179.

²⁶⁵ Johnson, “Revelation,” 733.

²⁶⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 827.

²⁶⁷ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 480.

saints” who are also “kings and priests” (Rev 1:6; 5:10).²⁶⁸ This matches better with the literary setting.

In this context, what does it need to happen to prepare the way in order those kings can take their position as rulers in the kingdom of Jesus Christ (cf. Rev 11:17)? The answer is that the waters of Euphrates needs to dry up. Paulien analyses that “by comparison with the previous plagues, the sixth plague seems like nothing. It is merely the drying up of one of the world’s thousands of rivers.”²⁶⁹ But, which does this river represent in John’s language? Paulien states that, in the book of Revelation, the Euphrates river represents the “civil and secular powers of the entire world—all nations, all races, all ethnic groups, and all languages groups.” Thus, the Euphrates river depicts the “political and military powers of the world that will give their support to end-time Babylon.”²⁷⁰ Thus, “when end-time Babylon loses its support system of nations, it will fall.”²⁷¹ Therefore, the condition to prepare the way for the kings from the east is the fall of Babylon. This is the effect of the sixth bowl.

In turn, Stefanovic adds that “the symbolic drying up of the Euphrates signifies, accordingly, that the secular powers and nations of the world that are in service to end-time Babylon will withdraw their support for this religious system.”²⁷² He believes that the fall of Babylon is connected to the three angel’s messages (Rev 14:6-11). Thus, “the proclamation of the everlasting gospel by the three angels certainly prepares the way” for the fall of Babylon

²⁶⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 498, 499.

²⁶⁹ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 101.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 104. See also Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 194.

²⁷¹ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 105.

²⁷² Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 498.

by unmasking her before her allies. However, he adds, “a sudden change in attitude must evidently come as a result of the realization of Babylon’s impotence to protect her followers from the unbearable terror of the [seven last] plagues.”²⁷³ So, the effects of the bowls upon the wicked will make them to realize the impotence of Babylon in protecting them. In this perspective, each of the bowls is to be seen as Michael’s actions to defend his people and to destroy the trust of the people in the great Babylon. Their cumulative effects will perpetrate her fall at the sixth bowl.

According to LaRondelle, the fall of Babylon will take place “when the civil multitudes of all nations suddenly realize that God has weighed and sentenced religious Babylon.” Before that, “they will at once withdraw their allegiance, even reversing their once loyal support into such active hate that they completely destroy Babylon.” According to him, this dissolution of Babylon is unfolded in Revelation 17.²⁷⁴ He adds that sudden change of the political powers and multitudes in their union with Babylon must have objective reasons. In his reasoning, “a special and shocking revelation of God to the nations would have such an impact.” He proposes that this “revelation” must come just *before* the sixth plague and might well occur during the fifth plague,” with the darkness “on the throne of the beast.”²⁷⁵ LaRondelle understands that the darkness on the throne of the beast, like in Egypt when the houses of the Israelites had light instead Egyptians’ had no (Exod 10:23), will cause the wicked to realize that Babylon under darkness is under God’s judgment. That will cause them to hate and destroy Babylon.

²⁷³ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 498.

²⁷⁴ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 104.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

However, actually all the plagues in Egypt and in the end-time drive the people to realize the difference between the people of God and those who are not. In Exodus 9:11, it is said that “the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians.” The Egyptians could see clearly that the magicians were under God’s judgment like them. This perception will drive people to realize that Babylon is also condemned like themselves before God.

Thus, since the Euphrates represents the people over whom mystical Babylon has dominion, the drying up of the waters is the “withdrawal their support from Babylon.” And this withdrawal of human support from mystical Babylon is “the removal of the last barrier to her ultimate defeat and punishment.”²⁷⁶

In this line of thought, the drying up of “Euphrates waters” is a required arrangement in the end time to prepare the way in order the kings or the elected of the Lamb can assume their position as coregents with him (cf. Rev 3:21; 11:17; 20:4). This is the fall of Babylon, an event that will make clearly who are the people of God before the eyes of every person on earth. Those who will not be affected by the bowls, as the Israelites in Egypt were not, will be recognized as the 144,000 “without fault before the throne of God” (Rev 14:5). This vindication of the people of God during the last plagues-judgment corresponds to their exaltation as the elected of the Lamb. Such a vindication will start at the first bowl and reach its climax at the sixth one with the complete unmasking and fall of the great Babylon.

²⁷⁶ Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:842.

Revelation Setting of the Drying up of Waters

The literary context in Revelation 16 seems to make clear that the coalition of kings who sustain Babylon in the final crisis will collapse at the sixth plague. This is depicted by the drying up of the Euphrates' waters. These kings are mentioned in Revelation 16 as the kings of the "whole world" (v. 14) and in Revelation 17 as "kings" (v. 2, 10, 18) and the "inhabitants of the earth" and "peoples" and "nations" (v. 2, 15) over whom the harlot is seated and rulers. The harlot is shown "seated" on "many waters" (17:1).

In the context of the sixth plague, John reports that the "three unclean spirits" in seeking the support of "the kings of the earth and whole world" (Rev 16:13, 14). Since the spirits seek this support, John is describing here a specific moment in which the spirits (religious power) and the kings (political powers) are separate. By explaining the sixth bowl, as considered above, the angel emphasizes that the harlot "sits on many waters" (Rev 17:1) and on the "kings" (17:2, 3, 9, 10). Then he explains that the "waters" are "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (17:15). Therefore, if the harlot is further seated "on the beast" which represents the "kings" (17:1, 3, 10), she is correlated to the spirits of 16:13 who get to dominate over the kings. This imply that the spirits were well-succeeded in their endeavor mentioned in 16:13-14. Beale says that "this is indicated by 17:1, where the Babylonian harlot 'sits on many waters,' which is another way of referring to 'the Euphrates and its waters' (16:12)."²⁷⁷

Moreover, the image of the harlot seated on the beast indicates that the political support the spirits were seeking (16:13-14) was reached in terms of making the kings servants of the harlot (who is correlate to the spirits). Therefore, the drying up of the "waters" indicates

²⁷⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 828.

the end of the support of the kings and nations of the earth to the harlot Babylon (16:12). Thus, the drying up of the waters determines the complete fragmentation of the coalition formed by the “spirits” (religious powers) and the “kings” (political powers) of the earth in their campaign against God and his people. In this perspective, the sixth plague could be the climax of Armageddon with the destruction of Babylon and the consequent widespread terror among the “kings of the earth” who will be terrified (Rev 6:15) at this moment. The emphasized “mourn” by the part of the kings, merchants, and people (Rev.18) because the destruction of the harlot indicates that they will be completely desolate after the sixth bowl. The Greek noun πένθος, “lament,” is used three times, and the verb πενθέω, “to lament,” others 3 times in Revelation 18 (v. 7, 8, 11, 15, 19). This deep lamentation indicates their condition of complete desolation after the fall of Babylon.

If the drying up of the waters, the effect of the sixth bowl, depicts the fall of harlot Babylon, there is no point in considering this fall as occurring *latter*, as part of the seventh bowl. In this case, the description of that fall in Revelation 17 and 18 is a recapitulation or explanation of the sixth bowl, as part of new cycle of visions. Moreover, the mention in Revelation 16:18-19 that the “great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath” would not be a sequential report after the plagues. Rather, this is a new report, starting with the regular Greek term *kai*, translated several times as “then” (as in Rev 16:14). This new report would be an introduction to the next set of visions in Revelation 17-20, which starts exactly with the judgment of Babylon, as we have seen in the last chapter.

In this case, the seventh bowl would be restricted to Revelation 16:17, ending with the phrase “It is done!” According to Revelation 15:1, with these seven bowls “the wrath of God

is finished” or completed (Greek τελέω). Also, Revelation 16:17 affirms “It is done!” by marking the consummation of God’s wrath. Therefore, what comes after those things is not a sequence of the further judgment on the harlot, but a recapitulation or a detailed unfolding of what has been done until this point. If this is the case, the battle of Armageddon is to be finished at the sixth bowl with the fall of Babylon, an event that will place the world in a condition of desolation.

The Destruction of Babylon

The imagery of the drying up of the waters in Revelation 16:12 seems to indicate the effect of this bowl in terms of the fall of Babylon at this specific moment. That event is also unfolded in a recapitulatory or cyclical revelation in chapters 17-18. How and for whom will the harlot be hated and destroyed?

It is very important here to take in account the language of the covenant used in this vision. Three times John uses the Greek verb πορνεύω, “to commit fornication,” to say that the harlot has an adulterous relationship with the king of the earth (Rev 17:2; 18:3, 9) by betraying his Lord. Others twice he uses the Greek verb σπρηνιάω to say that she “lived in sensuously” (18:7, 9). LaRondelle says that this “symbolic language” about Babylon the great living as a “prostitute” is a “covenantal language.” In doing so, John is continuing “the framework of the covenant of the Old Testament prophets” (cf. Isa 1:21; Hos 2:2, 4; Jer 3:1-3, 8, 9; Ezek 16:15-34).²⁷⁸

In this regarding, Aune adds that “John uses the metaphor of sexual immorality to characterize the relationship between Babylon and the kings of the earth,” because “it seems

²⁷⁸ LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” 159.

reasonable to suppose that he is denouncing the *political* alliances between Babylon and her client kingdoms.”²⁷⁹ LaRondelle argues that the ancient divine judgment on Jerusalem as an unfaithful wife, as reported by Ezekiel 16, resembles the judgment of God on another infidel covenant woman, Babylon, as depicted in Revelation 17. Thus, Ezekiel 16 and Revelation 17 both “stress the same judgment of God on the unfaithful wife,” and “her own former political lovers will destroy her.”²⁸⁰

Therefore, “the drying up of the Euphrates” waters is a “picture of how the multitudes of Babylon’s religious adherents throughout the world become disloyal to Babylon.”²⁸¹ Meanwhile, “the political side of the universal religious-political coalition ... becomes an instrument in the hands of God to execute the sentence against the religious side of the union.”²⁸²

Accordingly, LaRondelle explains that the “hermeneutical key” to understand the covenant language of Revelation 17 lies in discerning “its Christian-typological perspective, as established by Christ when he spoke out against ‘Jerusalem’ and her bloody covenant apostasy.”²⁸³ In this perspective, Jesus confirms “the theological pattern that the *covenant people* might turn to shed the blood of their own prophets and saints.” In this line, Jesus calls the teachers of the law and Pharisees of his time as “descendants of those who murdered the

²⁷⁹ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 931.

²⁸⁰ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 105.

²⁸¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 828.

²⁸² Nichol, ed. SDABC, 7:859.

²⁸³ LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” 160.

prophets.”²⁸⁴ Aune adds that Revelation 17:2 is based on “the analogy of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel and marriage contracts.”²⁸⁵ This a metaphor is found with particular frequency in the prophet Hosea (cf. 1:2; 2:4; 4:15; 9:1), Jeremiah (2:20; 3:2,9, 13; 5:7, 11; 13:27), and Ezekiel (6:9; 16; 23; 43:7, 9).

With this covenantal language which depicts an immoral relationship between the harlot and the kings, Revelation 17 differentiates Babylon and her supporters or lovers, with the pictures of the harlot and the seven-headed beast. A distinction is done “between the city and its waters, between Babylon and its waters of the Euphrates, between the harlot and the beast on which she is seated.”²⁸⁶ Therefore, there is an entity connected to Babylon in Revelation 17-18 which at first is her partner and then becomes her destroyer.

Paulien explains that “when a particular nation is powerful enough and determined enough to dominate others by force, we label it an empire.” This empire in Revelation 17 is the most important lover of the harlot. It is the major political power of the world, also depicted as the “eighth king” (17:11) as part of the end time structure of the seven-headed beast. Besides that, “at the end of time, the Euphrates river represents the power of many nations” that support the end-time Babylon.²⁸⁷ The covenant language employed in Revelation 17 requires that the harlot be separate from the beast, the religious power from the political power. The beast, as the eighth king (17:11), in the context of the end time is the very empire,

²⁸⁴ LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” 159.

²⁸⁵ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 930. cf. Lev. 17:7; 20:5-6; Num. 14:33; 15:39; Deut. 31:16; Judg. 2:17; 8:27; 1 Chr. 5:25; 2 Chr. 21:11; Psa. 73:27.

²⁸⁶ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” 376.

²⁸⁷ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 105.

the political power. This political empire supports the religious power, that is Babylon the harlot, in her endeavor against God's people. He gives his power to her, and she employ it to persecute the elected of the Lamb. Thus, the harlot is named "Babylon," and she is in adulterous relationship with the kings (the beast and the ten kings) in betrayal to God.

Therefore, "the surprise is that God will bring about the self-destruction of Babylon by way of her own supporters." The Euphrates' waters, that is the sustaining multitudes of the harlot (17:15), will suddenly be caused to dry up, to withdraw their strength. "The beast with the ten horns suddenly becomes the harlot's hater instead of her illicit lover, and destroys her completely (17:16)."²⁸⁸

This narrative of a harlot who manipulates the king and use his power trusted to her to persecute God's faithful has a clear narrative intertextuality with the report of the ancient Haman in Persia and the satraps in Mede-Persia. Haman got the "signet king" of Ahasuerus to make a death decree against the Jews because they had "different" laws in relation to the Persians (Esth 3:8, 10, 11, 14). But finally, the very Haman was killed by order of the king Ahasuerus who trusted Haman but further realized that was manipulated by him (Esth 7:9-10). Similarly, the Persian satraps persuaded the king Darius to sign a death decree against those who trust in God, as Daniel (Dan 6:5-9). However, the very satraps were killed by the king's command when he realized that was manipulated by them (6:24). Thus, the imagery of king supporters that kill people with whom they had former trustful relationship is well familiar in Scriptures.

²⁸⁸ LaRondelle, "Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues," 387.

Aune considers that when the angel²⁸⁹ promises in Revelation 17:1 to show John the judgment of the great whore, “that judgment is summarily predicted in 17:1 but it is in fact delayed until Revelation 18.” In Revelation 19:2, there is a retrospective mention of this motif when it is said that “he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication,” referring to Revelation 18.²⁹⁰

Thus, the drying up the Euphrates waters depicts the sixth bowl plague as a huge and sudden change in human affairs in the world at the end time. All the kings of the earth will be allied to the harlot Babylon. However, they will realize that she is unable to keep them from the judgments of God manifested in the plagues. They will realize also that were manipulated by her which will enrage their hate against her. This will make them to hate her and even to destroy her completely in fire.

When the Waters Are Dried Up

The very moment when the Babylon’s waters dry up is at sixth bowl. However, usually this report is considered not as a plague, but a preparation of the enemies for battle Armageddon. As we have seen until here, the sixth plague has the effect of the fall of Babylon.

Although LaRondelle considers Armageddon as taking place at the seventh plague, he sees the “drying of the Euphrates waters of Babylon,” at the sixth plague, as the “fall of Babylon.”²⁹¹ In this case, the fall of the great enemy (religious power) of the remnant people

²⁸⁹ Aune says that Revelation 17 also contains the first narrative appearance in this book of an *angelus interpres*, “interpreting angel,” a “stock figure in early Jewish apocalyptic literature first mention in Revelation 1:1” (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 915). Besides, “Revelation 17 is also peculiar in that the real focus of the interpretive section (v. 7-18)” (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 919).

²⁹⁰ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 915.

²⁹¹ LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” 147.

of God would take place before the seventh plague. LaRondelle adds that “this unholy war [Armageddon] in human history is the *prelude* to God’s holy war of the seven last plagues.”²⁹² With this statement, he is suggesting that the battle takes place before the very plagues. He adds that the “dynamic symbolism” (in Rev 16, 17) should not lead us to “overlook the concrete reality that the kings or political powers will wage a war on ‘the Lamb’ by persecuting and ultimately outlawing the faithful followers of Christ *on earth* (Rev 12:17; 13:15-17).”²⁹³ By mentioning these texts, LaRondelle sees the persecution on the last remnant, with the Sunday law, as the very Armageddon. Finally, he adds, “Armageddon is presented as the climactic battle of the great controversy between the forces of good and evil, which started in heaven and will end on earth” (cf. 12:7-9, 12).²⁹⁴

By his turn, Paulien also interprets Armageddon as taking place at the seventh plague. However, he states that “the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet depict the religious coalition,” named Babylon, which is the “great end-time religious confederacy.” By sending out the three frogs, or demonic spirits, Babylon will “assemble the kings of the earth for the final battle,” forming the great coalition of evil.²⁹⁵ He suggests that the drying up of the Euphrates waters (Rev 16:12) will break this “axis of evil.”²⁹⁶ By this time, God will separate Babylon from the political and military powers that sustained her. He adds, “The sixth angel who had poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates ... returned to elaborate on the sixth

²⁹² LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” 378, italics mine.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 374.

²⁹⁵ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 139.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

plague.”²⁹⁷ In this view, Paulien indicates that the content of the sixth plague is the very fall of Babylon, and henceforth the enemy coalition, the broken axis of evil, will no longer be able to persecute the people of God. Hence, he seems to suggest here that the climax of the final battle takes place at the sixth plague.

In turn, although Stefanovic also seems to interpret Armageddon as taking place at the final moment at Parousia, he considers that “the drying up of the waters in the Old Testament often symbolizes a mighty action of God on behalf of his people.” He highlights that, in the Old Testament, “the drying up of the waters by God is preparatory to the gathering of God’s people and bringing them back to their land.”²⁹⁸ In this view, Jeremiah prophesied that the “collapse of Babylon” would be the result of the drying up of the Euphrates river (Jer 50:35-38; 51:36-37).²⁹⁹

In a clear understanding in this line of thought, LaRondelle states that “Revelation 16 and 17 portray Armageddon as the total destruction of a universal Babylon. This is the theological essence of Armageddon.”³⁰⁰ Therefore, according to him, in this quotation, Armageddon is fought before and has its climax and the defeat of the enemy’s coalition at the sixth bowl plague. He adds that “Babylon denotes the illicit union of apostate religion and political rulership.” By stating that, he does suggest that the rise of the “image of the beast” (Rev 13:15) is the moment when the final crises initiates and the very context of the starting of Armageddon. Also, he says that “Modern Babylon, therefore, arises from an allegiance of

²⁹⁷ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 103.

²⁹⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 493. Cf. Isa 11:15-16; 51:10-11; Zech 10:10-11.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 106.

religious or ecclesiastical leadership and political government. The inevitable result is the promulgation of laws that enforce certain religious traditions on all citizens.”³⁰¹

According to LaRondelle, by God’s sovereign decree, “the two constitute bodies of Babylon will turn against each other and mutually destroy one another.” Revelation 17:16 reads that the beast and the kings will destroy the harlot. “The kings who had become one with the harlot by means of fornication will bring total ruin on her.”³⁰² This perspective seems to indicate that, by the sixth plague, the harlot Babylon will be annihilated, and this will impose on the broken coalition a state of deep mourning (cf. Rev 18:7-15).

By his turn, according to Paulien, Revelation 17 “builds on the earlier vision of the seven bowl plagues in Revelation 15 and 16.” Since the woman of Revelation 17:1 is named “Babylon” (v. 5), and the “many waters” of Babylon are the “Euphrates” river (Jer 51:7, 13), Revelation 17 is “particularly an exegesis of Revelation 16:12-16 (which includes reference to Armageddon), the sixth bowl plague.” Hence, he concludes that “Revelation 17 is about the final battle of earth’s history,” referred to from Revelation 12 through 19.³⁰³

If this interpretation is correct, the sixth plague does not foresee the “preparation” of the wicked coalition for the last battle, but portrays its complete disintegration and the desperate mourning for the fall of Babylon. To put it more sharply, it does not foresee the active campaign of the religious power but its final fragmentation and destruction by the part of their political and military allies.

³⁰¹ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 106.

³⁰² LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” 376.

³⁰³ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 208.

The prediction of the judgment through the kings over the religious power (the harlot) recalls the events after Middle Ages, when political powers in Europe acted against their religion. These events climaxed at the French Revolution. Nevertheless, this point can be expanded in the immediate context of the sixth plague.

In this perspective, the fall of Babylon is the very effect of the sixth bowl plague. The drying up of the waters in Bible background is indicative of defeat of the enemies of God's people not their strengthen or preparation to fight back. The ancient Pharaoh and his armies were completely defeated when the Red Sea was dried up. The same took place when Cyrus deviate the waters of the ancient Euphrates, with the resulting fall of Belteshazzar's Babylon. Therefore, the imagery of the drying up of the eschatological river Euphrates is the symbol to indicate the specific moment when the eschatological Babylon will be destroyed, by the hands of her very allies and partners.

Since Armageddon is to be finished at this crucial moment with the fall of the heart of the persecuting coalition, its starting time needs to take place before the plagues. This issue will be discussed in a more detailed manner in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5

THE MEANING OF ARMAGEDDON

John says in Revelation 16:16 that the three unclean spirits gathered the kings of the earth in the “place called in Hebrew Armageddon.” This word that is never used in the whole Scriptures unless here has challenged the scholars for much time. There are several interpretations about it. In the following discussion we try to understand the meaning of Armageddon from the presupposition that this is the last confrontation of a religious nature between the forces of good and evil at the climax of history. The Old Testament background of the Valley of Megiddo is taken in consideration with many wars defeated there.

The religious nature of Armageddon becomes clearer when one realizes *when* it takes place. A last battle after the plagues, after the finishing of the intercession at the heavenly temple, after the wrath of God have been poured out on the earth, would be incongruent with a religious battle for the mind of the people. That battle for the mind of the people and for their everlasting destiny by worshiping the true and only God creator makes sense if it takes place when people can still decide what side they want to be in the great controversy.³⁰⁴ The Old Testament events textually woven in Armageddon account in Revelation are very crucial in understanding the nature of the last battle.

³⁰⁴ Stefanovic says that, in the sanctuary scene in Revelation 15:5-8, “there is no further need for intercession, because the destiny of every person has been decided” (Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 8).

The Mount of Megiddo

The word “Armageddon” literally means “mount of Megiddo.” John joined the Hebrew word *har* (“mount”) with the Greek transliteration of the name *Meggido*. With this, he does not mention a specific location. In fact, he created a concept from the ancient events connected with this place. Since his language is rooted in the Old Testament imagery, it is clear that he had in mind the region of the Valley of Megiddo, surrounded by mountains.

Meggido was an ancient city located on a plain in the southwest portion of the large Valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon, the site of “several significant ancient battles.”³⁰⁵ Stefanovic recalls that *Magedon* occurs three times in the Septuagint (Josh 12:22; Judg 1:27; 2 Chr 35:22) and *mageddon* once (2 Kgs 9:27) with reference to Megido.³⁰⁶ Aune states that, since the place named “Armageddon” occurs only in Revelation 16:16, it may represent the “mythical apocalyptic-world mountain where the forces hostile to God, assembled by demonic spirits, will gather for final battle against God and his people.”³⁰⁷

Accordingly, Mounce agrees that Mageddon connects to the site of Megiddo, “one of history’s famous battlefields, having witnessed major conflicts.”³⁰⁸ Beale argues that, like the names “Babylon” and “Euphrates,” the term “Armageddon” does not refer to a specific geographical location, but to the “whole world.” In order to identify the meaning John had in mind, it is reasonable to consider that all the battles of Israel associated with Meggido and the nearby mountains become a “typological symbol of the last battle against the saints and Christ,

³⁰⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 898.

³⁰⁶ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 496.

³⁰⁷ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 898.

³⁰⁸ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 301.

which occurs throughout the earth.”³⁰⁹ Thus, all of the passages mentioning Israelites battles in “the vicinity of Meggido may stand behind the reference in Revelation 16:16.”³¹⁰

In this regarding, Murphy argues that Mount of Megiddo is never mentioned in ancient sources, and Megiddo itself is not located on a mountain but on a plain. However, he says, “Megiddo is close to Mount Carmel.”³¹¹ Thomas argues that the name Armageddon (Mount of Megiddo) brings a set of “intertexts” to Revelation 16, with the memory of many important battles that took place in that field. According to him, the vista of this site is “particularly stunning from the vantage point of Mount Carmel some ten kilometers to the northwest.” Thus, “the Hebrew name *Harmagedon* would, at the least, carry with its associations of war, as perhaps no other location would.”³¹² Stefanovic also recalls that “Mount Carmel hosted one of the most significant battles in Israel’s history—the battle in which the prophet Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18). It seems that this spiritual battle on the Mount Carmel stands behind the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16:16. The allusion to the Carmel event may already be observed in Revelation 13:13-14 where the earth beast brings fire “down from heaven to the earth before the people.”³¹³ Thomas considers that the first reader of Revelation perhaps would “recall the mountains of Israel (Ezek 38-39), important in one such eschatological context.” Besides, they could think that “if there is a valley of

³⁰⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 838.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 840.

³¹¹ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 344.

³¹² Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 485.

³¹³ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 496.

Megiddo where the nations shall mourn (Zech 12:11) there must be a mountain of Megiddo as well.”³¹⁴

Thus, the concept of Armageddon in John’s mind is very embedded within these many battles in which Israel were threatened by their enemies. In those battles, the people of God faced their enemies who wanted to destroy them. But in the battle on the Mount Carmel, Elijah fought to prove who is the true God worthy to be worshiped. If this is the most influential event in John’s mind, the nature of Armageddon is to be understood from this major event.

The Battles at Megiddo’s Valley

Not only the city of Megiddo, but also the entire Valley of Jezreel was the scenario of several conflicts. There, under the leadership of Deborah and Barak, Israel overcame the army of Sisera (Judg 4:14; 5:19). Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal in Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18), the most famous hill in that area. King Josiah died in the battle against Pharaoh Neco (2 Kgs 23:29). And Jezebel the queen died in the city of Jezreel (2 Kgs 9:30-37).

In the visions of Revelation 12 to 19, John takes up specific figures, characters, and terms from each one of those Old Testament battle events. He uses those pictures in a symbolic way. Like the place names “Babylon” and “Euphrates,” so “Armageddon” does not refer to a specific geographical location, but the whole world. “The battles in Israel associated with Megiddo and the nearby mountain become a typological symbol of the last battle against the saints and Christ, which occurs throughout the earth.”³¹⁵

³¹⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 486.

³¹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 838.

First of all, by describing the alliance between the “three unclean spirits” and the “kings of the earth” (Rev 16:14; 17:1, 2, 18), John seems to make allusion to Psalm 83 which sings the victory of Deborah and Barak (Judg 4:4-5:31). The psalmist says that the enemies of God “make a tumult” and “have taken crafty counsel” against his people. They “have consulted together” and “form a confederacy” against God (Ps 83:1-5). This psalm portrays the battle of Israel with a prophetic language that is alluded in Revelation. The psalmist has in view a coalition of infidels rising up against God’s elected in an attempt to annihilate them. The implicit allusion to the warriors Barak and Gideon (v. 9) suggests an active role of the saints in the last battle in Revelation.

Moreover, secondly, the wider context of Armageddon has a clear narrative intertextuality with the account of the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on the Carmel. Comparing the account of 1 Kings 18-19 and Revelation 12-19, one identifies many elements in parallel or in contrast which attests that John had that narrative in mind. The Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:19) stands to the Mount of Megiddo (“Armageddon,” Rev 16:16). The battle of Yahweh against Baal echoes in the fight of divine Trinity against the trio of evil (Rev 12-13). Elijah is a type of the remnant (1 Kgs 19:10; Rev 12:17). The idolatry to Baal is similar to the worship to the beast (Rev 13). In addition, Elijah did “gather all Israel” on the mountain (1 Kgs 18:19-20), and the unclean spirits will “gather” the kings at “Armageddon” (Rev 16:16). Elijah restores the altar of God (1 Kgs 18:30) and the remnant restores the biblical truth on the earth (Rev 14:6-12). Jezebel controlled Ahab (1Kgs 19:1-3), and the prostitute dominates over the beast and the ten kings (Rev 17:18). King Jehu kills Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:30-37) and the kings destroy the prostitute (Rev 17:16). Elijah kills the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:40) and Christ casts down the enemies into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20).

The verbal form συνήγαγεν, from συνάγω, “to gather together,” used twice in Rev 16 (v. 14, 16) occurs again in 19:19 and seems to be a key point in this whole account. Aune says that the “gathering of the nations hostile to the people of God for the final eschatological battle” is also found in Revelation 16:16; 19:17, 19; 20:8, and in a number of Old Testament and early Jewish texts (cf. Ezek 38-39; Joel 3:2; Zech 14:2; Ps 2:1-2; 4 Ezra 13:34-35; 1 Eno 56:7; 90:16-19).³¹⁶ Paulien adds that “the narrative of Elijah on Mount Carmel is like a background story to the whole account from Revelation 12 to Revelation 19. It functions a lot like the fall of Babylon account does in the same texts.”³¹⁷

Thus, the narrative of Elijah is a kind of background story for the whole account of Revelation 12-19. From this ancient event, John foresees the battle of Armageddon as a confrontation between the true and false religion at the end of time. The allusion to Elijah reinforces the active and victorious role of the saints by restoring the truth on the earth in the context of Armageddon. Moreover, the issue of Carmel about which God people should worship implies that Armageddon is to be seen as taking place before the last plagues, when the people may decide about this issue in the last days, in attendance to the first angel’s message (Rev 14:6). The notion of Armageddon as a religious/spiritual battle makes sense on this perspective.

Thirdly, the death of King Josiah by Pharaoh Neco in 609 BCE made the Valley of Jezreel a place of “great lamentation” (2 Chr 35:24, 25). John seems to have this in mind when he uses the Greek noun πένθος (“weeping”) three times and the verb πενθέω (“to mourn”) more three times in Revelation 18 (v. 7, 8, 11, 15, 19). Josiah’s death appeared to announce

³¹⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p.896.

³¹⁷ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 58.

the end of the kingdom of Judah. There was no more hope for those faithful to God before the death of such a righteous king. This gloomy event is alluded in Revelation as a harbinger of “great lamentation” for Babylon on the part of the inhabitants of the earth, including the *kings* (Rev 18:9-11, 19), her tormentors.

The “lamentation” motif in Revelation 18 also relates Armageddon to the tenth plague of Egyptian exodus. God warned that there would be “a great cry throughout the all the land of Egypt, such as was not like before,” for “against all the gods of Egypt” he would execute “judgment” (Exod 11:6; 12:12). In this sense, Doukhan points out that Armageddon recalls the tenth plague, which caused the “death of the religion” of the Egyptians, since the firstborn was the priest of the families.³¹⁸ LaRondelle adds that, since Armageddon is the culmination of the final divine judgments, it is useful to consider their typological connection with the plague-judgment on Egypt. “The ten plagues on Egypt culminated in the destruction of all the first born of the Egyptian and their livestock, because Yahweh would bring judgment on the land of Egypt and all her gods.”³¹⁹ He claims that “the symbolic term Armageddon” can have the literal meaning of “killing mountain,” since the Septuagint translates “Meggido” with the verbal expression, “being cut off” (ἐκκοπτομένου, in Zech 12:11). This suggests the following apocalyptic perspective: “Thus let all your enemies perish, O Lord!” (v. 31, NKJV).³²⁰

Therefore, the “lamentation” motif in Revelation 18 describes the judgment of God on the harlot Babylon by recalling the mourning for the Egyptian firstborns and for the King Josiah. This suggests that the climax of Armageddon will be very critical for the wicked rather

³¹⁸ Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 156, 158.

³¹⁹ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” 379.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 382.

than for the saints. The mourning of the wicked will start at the first plague and intensify until the sixth, with the fall of Babylon. At this time, the gods or religions of the nations will be “cut off” from the earth. That will be the end of any hope for the inhabitants of the world under the impending divine judgment. The “kings” who were allies of the “prostitute” Babylon (Rev 17:16) will eventually hate and annihilate her at the climax of Armageddon. Custer thinks in this line that Armageddon will be the “last battle on earth, fought and won by the sovereign power of God, before the setting up of the millennium kingdom (Rev 19:11-21).”³²¹

As intertexts in John’s account of the last battle, the events in the ancient Valley of Megiddo are very crucial in understanding Armageddon. John uses them as metaphors and resource of language to clarify what he had grasped about what the last battle will be at the end time. By placing the worship motif at the center of the last battle he suggests that this battle is of a different nature in relation to battle of Debora and Barak, for example. At the same time, he calls attention to the Carmel as his main narrative intertext in weaving the concept of Armageddon in Revelation.

Armageddon as a Religious Battle

The perception of the religious nature of Armageddon is clearer when we realize the both sides of the battle as very religious armies. By one side, the people of God fight by preaching the everlasting gospel to the whole world. By other side, the three demons seek to gather the kings of whole world trying to struck their work. This is a religious and spiritual confrontation that may not be realized for many people involved in their secular interests.

³²¹ Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise*, 180.

According to Paulien, in the last battle, “the kings from the rising of the sun are actually an end-time confederacy of saints (Rev 14:12) from every nation, tribe, language, and people (verse 6).” They are called by different names in Revelation. They are the “remnant” (Rev 12:17), “the 144,000” (Rev 7:4-9; 14:1-5), “the great multitude” (Rev 7:9-12; 19:1-6), “those who keep watch and hang on to their garments” (Rev 16:15), “the called, chosen, and faithful” followers of the Lamb (Rev 17:14), and, of course, “the kings from the east” (Rev 16:12). The “key” to their victory is the “drying up of the Euphrates river.”³²²

In this sense, the last battle has its conclusion when the “waters” are dried up. May be the better expression would that their victory will reach its climax at the drying up of the great River. They win by restoring the word of God on earth by preaching the three angel’s messages. And they are also “those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name” (Rev 15:2).

In sequence, Paulien further adds that Armageddon “will be the conclusion of a war that has gone on throughout Christian history.”³²³ The battle of Armageddon is about “intellectual, emotional, and spiritual allegiance.” According to him, “the great task that Christians face now is to discipline our minds and control our thoughts in order to prepare to be on God’s side in the final conflict of earth’s history.”³²⁴ Thus, for him, “the battle of Armageddon is a struggle for the mind. The role of the righteous in the final conflict is to keep

³²² Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 113.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 114.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

spiritually awake and to be always ready.” Armageddon is, therefore, about “the final proclamation of the gospel in the context of great deceptions and persecutions at the end.”³²⁵

This is a very crucial point in understanding Armageddon from the viewpoint of its connections to Carmel’s account. It is a religious war, that has to do with worship. That battle has its climax in the period when people on the earth need to decide whether they worship God or the dragon and the beast (Rev 14:6, 9).

Accordingly, LaRondelle adds that Ezekiel 38:18-22 leaves no doubt that God will intervene again in history. “As victorious warrior, he will fight for his people as he used to in ancient times.” The background of Ezekiel and Joel allow to see “the nature of the last war not as a secular conflict of nation against nation but as the cosmic-universal battle between heaven and a world united in rebellion against God and his covenant people.”³²⁶ He adds that “the battle of God is against the last assailants of Messianic remnant people and of their divine worship.”³²⁷ This is the view of Desmond Ford as well. He describes the implications of Armageddon for the last generation of Christians. According to him, Revelation 13 points to “the long-anticipated crisis at the end of the age—the crisis which ushers in the Day of the Lord and Armageddon.” Armageddon is to the church what Calvary was to Christ, “the last conflict, the hiding of God’s face, threatened extinction, but ultimate deliverance.”³²⁸

³²⁵ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door.*, 120.

³²⁶ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 56, 57.

³²⁷ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 61. Cf. Ps 2; Joel 2:32; Dan 11:45; 12:1; Ezek 38, 39; Zech 12:8, 9; 13:9; 14:1-3.

³²⁸ Desmond Ford, *Crisis: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (New Castle, CA, 1982), vol. II, 578.

In this regarding, Stefanovic highlights that Armageddon is “a battle in which all the people of the earth must give allegiance to either God or Satan.” He adds that “the ultimate issue will be regarded who God is, as it was on Mount Carmel. What God did on Carmel he will do once again in the final battle; he will win triumphal victory over the oppressor of his people.” He recalls that the battle on Carmel had the purpose to “demonstrate that the Lord was the true God of Israel to be worshiped.”³²⁹ He goes further,

The battle of Armageddon echoes the well-known conflict on Mount Carmel between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18). The issue to be resolved once and for all on Mount Carmel was to identify the true God: “If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). . . . The final battle of Armageddon is not a military battle but a spiritual one—the battle for the minds of the people.³³⁰

The nature of the final battle, if the Carmel is in its background, has nothing to do with destroying people in first plan, but in providing evidence that God is the true Creator and worthy of worship. The main result of the Carmel was not a manifestation of physical force upon Baal’s prophets, but the unmasking them as false prophets and Baal as a false god. The purpose of the Carmel encounter as the spiritual struggle was to demonstrate that God is the only God. In giving allegiance to God or Satan people decide their side before Jesus finishing his ministration in heaven. His intercession has the purpose to strengthen and guide the people to choose the right side.

In this context, Rotz recalls the connected phrase in Revelation 16:15 that has a promise to the faithful in that grievous time. “The blessing is for those who stay *awake* and keep their *clothes* with them, although it may mean keeping clothes clean and ready.” He adds

³²⁹ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 497.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 502, 503.

that this metaphor is similar to that in the letter to the Laodiceans who were urged to purchase “white clothes” to cover their “shameful nakedness” (cf. 3:18). This admonition also relates to the “fine linen” *clothes* that symbolize “the righteous deeds of the saints” (cf. Rev 19:8; see 3:4, 5, 18).³³¹

This last battle for the mind of the people on earth is the very struggle perpetrated by the proclamation of the three angel’s messages and their counterpart by the three demons. Throughout the years from 1844 that struggle is in occurrence and runs for its climax in the battle of Armageddon, when the kings, political and secular powers, will assume the side with the demons as we will see further in more details.

This understanding of Armageddon of a battle focused on the worship issues makes sense when one considers that the Sabbath and the call to worship the God creator are at the center of this final controversy. The imagery of the Carmel with Elijah engaged in restoring the worship of God in Israel resembles the role of the remnant in restoring the word of God and his worship by calling the people to enter into the Sabbath cycle as way to announce the true God as the creator of everything on earth. The conception of an Armageddon battle related to the three angel’s messages in the context of the work of the three demons makes sense having the event of the Carmel in its background.

³³¹ Rotz, *Revelation*, 242.

CHAPTER 6

THE START OF ARMAGEDDON

Since the coalition of God's enemies will collapse with the fall of Babylon at the time of the sixth plague, it seems that there is no possibility that the wicked can organize themselves to fight against Christ after this bowl. In fact, the interpretation of an Armageddon battle after the sixth plague seems to be out of place, as the kings of the earth will be terrified (Rev 6:15) and all the inhabitants of the earth will be in a deep mourning and cry (Rev 18:7, 8, 11, 15, 19).

Moreover, since Armageddon is a religious war for the mind of people, there is no sense in such a battle after the close of Jesus heavenly ministry. More precisely, the sixth plague (Rev 16:12) implies the *fragmentation* of these enemies rather than their *gathering*. If this is so, when do the spirits will gather the kings for this battle according to Revelation 16:16? Furthermore, when does the preparation for the last battle takes place?

These issues need to be discussed from the notion of the nature of Armageddon as religious war "for the mind of the people," as well as from the setting of Revelation 12-19. In dealing with this topic, we need to consider the connection between the signs of the demons in Revelation 16:14 and the signs performed by the false prophet in Revelation 13:13.

The Three Unclean Spirits Like Frogs

In Revelation 16:13, John describes "three unclean spirits" that come out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, who seek to "gather together" the kings of the

earth to fight at Armageddon. Who are those spirits and how they perform their task are important question in figuring out their identity in Revelation visions.

The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (the second beast) are to be seen as these symbols stand for in Revelation, as political powers.³³² However, in Revelation 16:13 John talks about three “spirits” that come out of their mouth. Since the beasts stand for political powers, the spirits from them should be seen as the religious entities that spring out front them. In this line, the religious forces are seeking the support of the political institutions to face the last battle.

In this context, Kistemaker highlights that John uses the symbol of three evil spirits, who are the “speakers” to compare this trio with frogs which croak constantly in the swamp. The word *frog* appears only once in the entire New Testament, and in the Old Testament only with reference to the second plague in Egypt (Exod 8:2-6; Pss 78:45; 105:30), when the magicians tried to imitate the work of God. John identifies frogs with “unclean spirits.” In addition to misrepresenting the truth, “these spirits possess the ability to perform signs and deceive the public.”³³³ Beale considers that “frogs are chosen as pictures of deceptive influence also because they were one of the two Egyptian plagues that Pharaoh’s magicians

³³² Aune considers that “the chief interpretive problem with this explanatory phrase [Rev 16:14] is that as the text stands it is not the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet who go out to assemble the kings of the world for battle, but the demons that proceed from their mouths.” He says that this “lead to a problem of the subject of συναγαγεῖν, ‘gathered,’ in v. 16; it could be the demons or the unholy trinity of the dragon, beast, and false prophet)” (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 894). This question has no clear reason because in the immediate context who gathers the kings is who was seeking them to put them together, that is “the spirits” (16:14).

³³³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 449.

were able to reproduce through their deceptive arts (Exod 8:7).³³⁴ Thus, these frogs in Revelation are clearly an image of a work of counterfeiting, opposition, and falsification.

In this line, Mounce declares that the evil spirits coming out of the *mouth* of the “unholy triumvirate” indicate a “deceptive and persuasive propaganda” that in the last days will lead people to an unconditional commitment to the cause of evil. He adds that the “people duped by the subtle propaganda of secularism have cut themselves off from the source of truth and must bear the inevitable consequences.”³³⁵ He states, “The activity of the deceptive and demonic spirits reminds us of the living spirit who through the mouth of Ahab’s prophets would entice the profligate into battle” (1 Kgs 22:19-23). The evil spirits in Revelation work their spell on “world rulers rather than ordinary people.”³³⁶ The mention of “frogs” (Rev 16:13) reminds the reader of the “second Egyptian plague” (cf. Exod 8:1-15).³³⁷

More precisely, Paulien reasons that, since the spirits of demons going out to gather the kings of the earth” resembles “three frogs” (Rev 16:13, 14), this imagery suggests a “strong role of spiritualism in unifying the world for a common cause.”³³⁸ In this view, the three demons would represent the religions that spread a system of worship contrary to God’s law exalted by the three divine angels (Rev 14:6-7; cf. 12:17; 14:12). For Aune, it is not the

³³⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 832. “This is the first occurrence of ‘false prophet’ (ψευδοπροφήτης) in the Apocalypse. The word summarizes the deceptive role of the second beast. Elsewhere in the NT the ‘false prophet’ without exception speaks falsehood *within the covenant community of Israel or the church* in order to deceive (Matt 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; Acts 13:6; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1)” (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 831).

³³⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 299.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 299.

³³⁸ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 173.

dragon, the beast, and the false prophet who go out to assemble the kings of the world for battle, “but the demons that proceed from their mouths.”³³⁹ This has to do with a propaganda, a campaign to promote false ideas. While the three pure angels are calling people to worship the true God according to his commandments, the unclean ones are calling people to worship the beast according to its commandments.

By his turn, Beale argues that these demons are “doing signs (ποιούντα σημεῖα),” which identifies them with the work of the “deceptive agents” in Revelation 13:13. Thus, “these spirits are associated with the activity of the second beast or false prophet.”³⁴⁰ Johnson also argues that “these demons produce miraculous signs like the false prophet (13:13-14), and this connects their activity to the deception of the earth’s kings.”³⁴¹ In this case, the “signs” create a parallel between the two prophetic reports, indicating that the time of the propaganda of the demons (Rev 16:13, 14) is the same as that of the second beast (Rev 13:13). Meanwhile, the second beast operates “sings” to “deceives those who dwell on the earth” in order they “make an image of the beast” (Rev 13:14). Thus, such a “sings” are performed before the rise of the image of the beast (13:15), and logically before the last plagues and before the image of the beast could persecute and kill those who do not worship the first beast (13:15).

Moreover, the “spirits” address the “kings,” that is, the political power. This statement suggests that, at the specific time indicated in Revelation 16:14, the religious powers are separate from the political power. Because that the “demons” seek the support of the kings because they call for the unity between church and state. The “signs” performed by the second

³³⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 894.

³⁴⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 834.

³⁴¹ Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:551.

beast (Rev 13:14) and the “signs” performed by the “demons” (Rev 16:14) highlight the fascination of religious power as the catalytic element to gather the “kings of the earth” to Armageddon. Therefore, the action of the “three unclean spirits” is in parallel with the performance of the “false prophet” in Revelation 13:14. Both visions highlight the same initiative of the religious power in seeking the political power. The consequent union between church and state will result in making human laws against God’s law on earth. Thus, the result of the demons’ effort is to get the *ingress* of the political powers into a war of religious affairs.

Paulien discuss the imagery of Revelation 16:14 about the three “demons.” “What is a demon? An evil angel,” he answers. These “three unclean spirits,” according to him, would be three fallen angels who are the counterpart of the three heavenly angels of Revelation 14. “The gathering of the kings of the world by the three unclean spirits (Rev 16:13, 14) is the demonic counterpart of the gathering call of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-11, who represents the followers of the Lamb.”³⁴² Both groups of angels “have a mission to the whole world (Rev 14:6; 16:14; see the chart below). One calls the world to worship God while the other trio seeks to gather the people of the world into a service of the unholy trinity.”³⁴³

Therefore, Paulien argues, “the battle of Armageddon serves as the climax of the spiritual war over worship outlined in chapter 13 and 14.”³⁴⁴ The three angels of Revelation 14 represent the remnant people who restores the truth and the law of God on earth, including the fourth commandment, the Sabbath.³⁴⁵ Paulien also adds that “the gathering of the kings of the

³⁴² Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 60.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁴⁵ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 454-456.

world” by the three unclean spirits (Rev 16:13, 14) is the demonic counterpart to “the gathering call of the three angels” (Rev 14:6-11), “who represent the followers of the Lamb.” According to him, from this viewpoint, the battle of Armageddon is the final phase of the conflict over worship that involve the image of the beast and the mark of the beast (cf. Rev 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11), a war that “brings the whole world to a fateful decision with permanent results.” In this line, he sees the battle of Armageddon as the very conflict about choosing to bear the “mark of the beast” (Rev 13:16) or the “seal of God” (7:3; 14:1). He adds that “a closer look at chapters 13-17 of Revelation will unpack the details of the battle of Armageddon.”³⁴⁶ Indeed, in Revelation 17:14, the Greek phrase ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον, battle is articular indicating that it is a known battle, already reported, in 12:17; 16:14.

Thus, in this perspective, by taking Revelation 13:11-18 close to chapter 16:16, Armageddon is seen as the very war perpetrated by the rise of the “image of the beast.” In this vision, that rise resulted from the work of the false prophet by performing “great signs” (13:13). The endeavor of the second beast to drive “those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast” (13:14) correspond to the campaign of the demons to “gather” the kings together to the battle (16:14). The result of making an image to the beast in a global context is to globalize the battle of Armageddon that starts in the geographical dominion of the second beast.

In observing Revelation 14 and 16, LaRondelle states that those visions show that God sends three angels to “announce his final warning to all who live on earth in order to counteract the work of the ‘three evil spirits’” (14:6-9; 16:13, 14). According to him, “the angels urge the saints to remain loyal to God’s commands and to be ‘faithful to Jesus’ (Rev

³⁴⁶ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 60.

14:12),” while the “three satanic spirits influence the political rulers of the whole world ‘to gather them for the battle’ against God at Armageddon (Rev 16:14, 16).” Moreover, “the three holy angels of God plead for all believers to leave Babylon and to stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1/ 18:4).”³⁴⁷

Therefore, according to the reasoning above, the work of the three demons and the three angels comes in parallel and competition for the mind of the people. See the chart:

Three angels (Rev 14)	Three demons (Rev 16)
Eternal gospel Divine judgment (death) Law of God (“fear God”) Sabbath Seal of God Creation	False gospel Spiritualism (immortal soul) Human laws (“the kings”) Sunday Mark of the beast Evolution

Since the three angels depict God’s people in their endeavor to restore the truth and the worship of the true God on earth, who would be depicted by the three demons? Since the Sabbath in connection to the worship to the only Creator God is at the center of Armageddon, those movements against this eschatological calling are depicted by the fallen angels of Revelation 16. In this sense, from the dragon (or the Roman Empire) would spring the spirit of modern spiritualism, or paganism; from the beast (or the Papal Rome) the Christianity that abandoned the Bible truth about the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant; and from the false prophet (the modern Empire) those Protestant religions that come from traditional Christianity but still follow its human law in this matter. The “three unclean spirits” apparently either

³⁴⁷ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 151.

symbolize or represent this evil trio of religious powers, which together constitute latter-day 'great Babylon' (ch. 16:13, 14, 18, 19).³⁴⁸

Before this contrast between the two groups of "three angels," a crucial question emerges. For the most of Revelation scholars the work of those demons would take place after the sixth plague, thus after the close of Jesus heavenly ministry.³⁴⁹ Taking into account that the three demons (Rev 16:13, 14) are the counterpart of the three heavenly angels (Rev 14:6-12), whose work starts in 1844 according to Adventist traditional understanding³⁵⁰ by announcing the coming of God's judgment, why would the three demons begin their work so late in comparison with the work of their counterpart?

This understanding about the starting of the work of three angels is because in the middle of the 19th is when began in Christianity the restoration of the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant between God and the new Israel. Thus, why would the demons wait until the sixth plague to counterfeit the work of restoration of truth started in 1844? In other words, how do we understand the descriptive visions about the three demons placed after the sixth bowl?

³⁴⁸ Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:844.

³⁴⁹ Cf. Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 60; LaRondelle, "Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues," 135, 148; Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:842, 843; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 503, 499; Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 151, 152; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 866; Johnson, "Revelation," 551.

³⁵⁰ See Alberto R. Timm, "The *Sanctuary* and the Three Angels' Messages 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines," Andrews University Seminary PhD Dissertation (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1995); George Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd edition (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 28-50.

A Parenthetical Vision

The reading of Revelation 16:12-16 as a textual and consecutive unity *seems* to be the natural way to understand the text. In this case, the demons would gather the kings at the sixth plague by performing signs in order to fight the last battle just at the Parousia. However, as we have seen there is no room for such a religious battle for the mind of the people after the close of Jesus ministry at the heavenly temple, when everybody had decided to have the mark of the beast or the seal of God. We have seen also that the work of the demons is the counterpart of the three angel's messages, which represent the restoration of God's truth on earth as resembled in Elijah's prophetic ministry in the ancient Israel against Baal's prophets. In this perspective, we have to find a way to understand literarily the textual unity in Revelation 16:12-16.

The hypothesis sustained by this book is that the account of the spirits' campaign to gather the kings of the earth together (Rev 16:13-14) is a *parenthetical section* or an *interlude* between the sixth and the seventh bowl plagues. This interlude comes in the same pattern as the heptad of the seven seals and seven trumpets, forming the trio of numbered heptads following creation account in Genesis 1. The interlude goes back to a previous context to elucidate what is going on in the present moment.

In the immediate context, Revelation 16:12 depicts the drying up of the "waters." Since "waters" stand for "peoples" who support the end time Babylon (Rev 17:15), the text suggests a disintegration or dispersion of such a coalition. Thus, we may say that the central concept of this sixth bowl is one of "dispersion." Then, the phrase καὶ εἶδον which starts the verse 13 seems to introduce a parenthesis with a "new theme or textual unit" (see the chart below). In this parenthetical unity the verb συναγαγεῖν ("to gather," v. 14, 16) is a key-link. Thus, the

central concept of this textual unity is one of “gathering.” This concept of “gathering” is in exact opposition to the central concept of the sixth bowl which is “dispersion.”³⁵¹

In this regarding, this parenthetical section which is a kind of *flashback* would reveal how the political support to Babylon was built before the plagues. Hence, Revelation 16:13-14 would be a *flashback* to the previous *gathering* or the formation of the coalition that will be *dispersed* at the sixth plague. Accordingly, the gathering of the kings of the earth to give support to the religious power takes place before the plagues and results in the time of persecution as depicted in Revelation 13:11-18.

<p>Rev 16:12-16</p> <p>“12 Then [καὶ] the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and <i>its water was dried up</i>, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared [Central concept: <i>scattering or dispersion</i>].</p>	<p>Structure</p> <p><i>Sixth bowl</i> The Fall of Babylon</p>
<p>13 <i>And I saw</i> [καὶ εἶδον] three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are <i>spirits of demons</i>, performing <i>signs</i>, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, <i>to gather</i> them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty [Central concept: <i>gathering or coalition</i>].</p>	<p><i>Flashback</i> Parenthesis Allusion to the <i>previous</i> forging of the pursuer forces that are broken at the sixth bowl</p>
<p>15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”</p>	<p><i>Admonition</i> Jesus is coming soon</p>
<p>16 And they <i>gathered</i> them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”</p>	<p><i>The Battle</i> Apex is at sixth bowl</p>

³⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 867. According to Aune, the particle “καὶ εἶδον function in three ways: (1) It introduces a new vision narrative (8:2; 10:1; 13:1; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1; 19:11, 17; 20:1, 4, 12; 21:1). (2) It introduces a major scene within a continuing vision narrative (5:1; 6:1; 8:13; 13:11; 15:2; 19:19; 21:2, 22) (3) It is used to focus on a new or significant figure or action that occurs within a continuing vision narrative (5:2, 6, 11; 6:2, 5, 8, 12; 7:2; 9:1; 16:13, 6)” (Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 338).

Arguably, this parenthetical vision about the formation of this coalition follows the same pattern already used in the seals and the trumpets visions. After the sixth seal, John reports the vision about the sealing of the 144,000 that takes place before the manifestation of the anger of God and Christ described in Revelation 6:14-16. In this case, the interlude in chapter 7 is also a kind of flashback. There is a similar flashback parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Chapters 10 and 11 go back to the time of the end, with the command to “prophecy to many peoples and nations” (Rev 10:11) and to measure the sanctuary (11:1), a language of preaching and judgment, respectively. This prophesying of course precedes the work of the demonic cavalry depicted in the sixth trumpet (9:13-21).

The most of the Revelation commentators consider chapters 7 and 10-11 as interludes or parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals and trumpets, respectively. Beale argues that chapter 7 is a “parenthesis explaining the vision of ch. 6 in more depth and providing a larger background against which it may be understood better.” He states that Revelation 7:1-8 “precedes” the time of 6:14-17, and 7:9-17 focuses on the time after the final judgment, which has been portrayed in its initial phase in 6:12-17.”³⁵² He argues that God’s servants are to be sealed “before the wrathful events [6:14-17] can be set in motion.” Therefore, the “sealing activity” takes place “before those woeful events.”³⁵³ He claims that there is a “similar parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets.”³⁵⁴ In Beale’s view, this parenthesis “does

³⁵² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 406.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 408.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 199, 520.

not intervene chronologically between the sixth and seventh trumpets but offers a further interpretation of the church age, the period of time covered by the first six trumpets.”³⁵⁵

In turn, Mounce also identifies an “interlude” between the sixth and seventh seal in the two visions reported in Revelation 7. For him, this is a “stylistic feature repeated in the trumpet sequence (10:1-11:13).”³⁵⁶ He adds that “in both visions the church is in view,” being “sealed so as to be saved from the destruction coming upon the earth and to be brought safely into the heavenly kingdom.”³⁵⁷

With regard to the parenthesis between sixth and seventh trumpets, Kistemaker sustains that the “little scroll” links chapter 10 and 11. “Its content seems to be the gospel that the church proclaims to the world (Rev 11:3-7),” of course, before the events of the sixth trumpet. He contends that the church must “prophesy God’s word and the testimony of Jesus,” and this “gospel must be proclaimed to ‘many peoples, nations, languages, and kings’ (10:11).” The task of the two witnesses, “namely the church, is to proclaim the message of salvation in a hostile world” (cf. 11:3). Kistemaker understands that the period during which this message is preached “relates not to the time of the last trumpet, as many have held, but to the entire period with which this book is concerned.”³⁵⁸ The same group of people in Revelation 10:11 is mentioned in 7:9 and 14:6. Those who hear the gospel in the context of judgment could be sealed and saved. In this line, Johnson says, “As in the seals, the sequence

³⁵⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 521.

³⁵⁶ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 154. He adds that there will be no corresponding interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls judgments because at that time all warning and preliminary judgment will be over. “When the bowls of divine wrath are poured out, the consummation moves quickly to its climax” (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 199).

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁵⁸ Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 307.

of the sixth and seventh trumpets is interrupted to provide additional information bearing on the *previous* events and to prepare the reader for further developments.”³⁵⁹

Stefanovic also considers Revelation 7 as an “inserted” parenthesis “between the opening of the sixth seal and of the seventh.”³⁶⁰ He says that Revelation 10 and 11 is inserted between the sixth and seventh trumpets as a “sort of interlude.” Indeed, Revelation 7 “might be the clue for the understanding of chapters 10-11, particularly with regard to the identity of the two witness.”³⁶¹ According to him, the seven trumpets series follows the same pattern. The interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets seems to provide the answer to the question: “What is the task of the Church in these trouble times?” Thus, Revelation 10 and 11 describe the experience of God’s people in the world and their role in preaching the gospel “as the final days of earth’s history approach their close.”³⁶²

It is interesting to consider that the work of the sealing (Rev 7), the prophesying and the two witness (Rev 10-11) and the three angel’s messages (Rev 14) are the same endeavoring. And this work of proclamation goes in parallel to its counterpart by the three demons depicted in the third interlude between also the sixth and seventh element of those three numbered heptads of visions. Therefore, the work of the church revealed in these parenthetical visions has to do with the same work of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12, against which the campaign of the three unclean spirits intends to counterfeit. See the chart below.

³⁵⁹ Johnson, “Revelation,” 496; italics mine.

³⁶⁰ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 259.

³⁶¹ Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns in Revelation,” 4.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 325.

Rev 6:1-17 Six Seals	Rev 8-9 Six Trumpets	Rev 16:1-12 Six Bowls
Rev 7:1-17 <i>Flashback</i> The sealing 144.000	Rev 10-11 (14:6) <i>Flashback</i> The mission to prophecy	Rev 16:13-16 <i>Flashback</i> The propaganda of the demons
FLASHBACK ALLUSIONS TO THE TIME OF THE END		
Rev 8:1 Seventh Seal	Rev 11:15-18 Seventh Trumpet	Rev 16:17 Seventh Bowl

Mounce argues, “These interludes [Rev 7, 10-11] are not pauses in a sequence of events as they are literary devices by which the church is instructed concerning its role and destiny during the final period of world history.”³⁶³ He recognizes that Revelation 16:13-16 is “sometimes taken as a brief interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls similar in structure to the break between the sixth and seventh seals and the sixth and seventh trumpets.” This would limit the sixth bowl to Revelation 16:12. It is John’s style to make “the fifth and sixth elements in each series considerably longer than the first four.” In this perspective, Mounce says the verses 13-16 should be “a topical expansion of v. 12.”³⁶⁴

LaRondelle comes to recognize Revelation 16:13-16 as a parenthetical section although he does not consider the section as a kind of flashback neither apply it in a clear way in his general definition about the time of Armageddon. He says, “This section [16:13-16] records a

³⁶³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 199.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

distinct vision ('Then I saw') that seems to interrupt the flow of the sixth and seventh plagues. We may understand the interlude as a description of how the demonic spirits prepare the world for the final war of God."³⁶⁵ Krodel understands that there is interruption and interlude in Revelation 16 as well. He says that, "in addition to the interruption, we also find an interlude in v. 13-16 which is introduced as new vision with 'and I saw'." He adds that the theme of the interlude will be "unfolded in Parousia's vision in 19:11-20."³⁶⁶ Custer also considers Revelation 16:13-16 as a "parenthesis" between the two-last bowls but he is not clear in understanding its content in the setting. He says that in 16:13, for the first time in Revelation, "we see the satanic trinity mentioned in the same verse." And he adds, "The Devil tries to counterfeit the true nature of God. These three monsters of depravity gather the armies of the world together." Thus, he comes to the idea of counterfeiting but not in relation to the three angels unless the holy trinity."³⁶⁷

In turn, Osborne also recognizes the "interlude" of Revelation 16:13-16 after the sixth bowl plague though he does not unfold its implications.³⁶⁸ Knight goes in the same way, "This interlude [16:13-16] heightens the dramatic effect of the ... three foul spirits like frogs [that] come from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet."³⁶⁹

Murphy, by his turn, from a preterist viewpoint, comes to the same literary perception. He understands that "since 16:12 is an attack on Rome" the next vision in 16:13-17 is "a battle

³⁶⁵ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 124.

³⁶⁶ Krodel, *Revelation*, 281.

³⁶⁷ Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise*, 179; italics mine.

³⁶⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 589.

³⁶⁹ Knight, *Revelation*, 120.

between God and his enemies,” thus this “latter passage is an interlude coming between the sixth and seventh bowls.” He adds that, the “destruction of Rome implied in 16:12” is latter narrated in the seventh bowl (16:17-21), “while the final battle between good and evil prepared for in 16:13-16 is carried out in chapter 19.” He adds that “the contrasting allusions in 16:12 and 16:13-16” supply “an interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls, as there was an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals (chapter 7) and the sixth and seventh trumpets (10:1-11:13).” He argues that some commentators resist the idea of an interlude in Revelation 16:13-16 because “this theory would shorten the sixth bowl to a single verse, and so break the pattern established in the seals and trumpets of the fifth and sixth elements beings longer and more developed than the first four.” However, he comes to states that this objection is not strong because “one way or another the pattern changes.”³⁷⁰

In the perspective of reading Revelation 16:13-16 as an interlude, the work of the three demons in performing signs is in parallel to the work of the false prophet who also perform signs. Thus, the actions of the “image of the beast,” the most powerful of the “kings of the earth,” in imposing the mark of the beast and a global economic boycott to those who do not have the mark of the beast (Rev 13:15-16), seems to mark the *starting time* of Armageddon, or the starting time of the most grievous moment of Armageddon when the civil and political powers take place into the religious affairs. In this view, the final battle begins before the plagues and it is finally overpowered by God at the sixth plague, with the fall of Babylon and the disintegration of the evil coalition.

³⁷⁰ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 342.

The Work of the Spirits as a Flashback

Although Paulien comes to indicate that the work of preparation by the part of the demons for Armageddon takes place during the sixth bowl,³⁷¹ he recognizes that Revelation 16:12-16 is a literary construction that call for attention. He even comes to defends that the work of the demons in 16:13-14 refers to a moment *before* the fall of Babylon.

Here's the most confusing thing about the sixth bowl plague. The plague itself is the drying up of the Euphrates (Rev 16:12), symbolizing Babylon's loss of political, economic, and military support at the close of the battle of Armageddon. The political powers of the world change their mind. So, *the events of verses 13-15 must be prior in time to the events of verse 12*. In verses 13 and 14 Babylon gathers its political support for the battle, in order to attack the saints. Then the verse 15 comes the final call to the saints. *Armageddon (verse 16) is the climax of two gospels going to the world*. Only after the end-time axis of evil is in place can the drying up of the Euphrates occurs. So, while the seven last plagues are after the close of probation, *Revelation 16:13-16 present events that are earlier than the sixth plague, even before the close of probation*. The events of Revelation 16 and 17 are all related to Armageddon, but the book of Revelation does not present them in chronological order.³⁷²

Thus, four important and crucial remarks are to be done from this Paulien's statement:

(1) The sixth bowl plague is the fall of Babylon. (2) The gathering of the political forces by the three demons in support to Babylon takes place *before* her fall at sixth plague. (3) After Babylon getting kings' support is that the last persecution depicted in Revelation 13:15-18 will start. And (4) Armageddon is the climax of a war that started when the "everlasting gospel" and the restored truth began to be preached by the three angels in parallel with its counterfeiting by the demons.

Regarding this parallel and competitive campaigns, he says that Revelation makes clear that "a worldwide proclamation of a counterfeit gospel (Rev 9:14-16; 16:13, 14) will occurs at

³⁷¹ Paulien says that "the sixth bowl plague itself is not the battle of Armageddon" but "the gathering of the forces [through the demons] for that conflict" (Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 60).

³⁷² Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 141, italics mine.

the end,” and this counterfeit will be “the great deception of the unholy trinity (Rev 13).”

According to him, this work of counterfeiting “seeks to confuse those who hear the true gospel as to just where the truth lies. The two proclamations go out to the world *side by side*.” The preaching of the true gospel is “the context in which the end-time deception functions.”³⁷³

Paulien also suggests that the same events are indicated by Jesus (cf. Matt. 24:24-27) and Paul (2 Thess 2:8-12). The connections between the three demons and the demonic cavalry in Revelation 9:14-16 will be discussed more detailed in the next chapters.

Therefore, there is evidence of a literary pattern in Revelation in which the author includes a parenthetic section between the sixth and seventh prophetic vision. In the three visions (Rev 7; 10-11; 16:13-16), John seems to make this parenthesis by going back to a time *before* the events that are implied in the apex of the sixth element. All of them are connected with the time of the end. The admonition to keep and watch (Rev 16:15) is described in terms of being clothed at the end time. “The faithful are admonished to be on the alert for this great event—not taken by surprise as a soldier who, when the alarm is sounded, must run away naked because he has misplaced his clothing.”³⁷⁴ This remind us of the same admonition given to Laodicea (Rev 3:18), the people of the time of judgment.

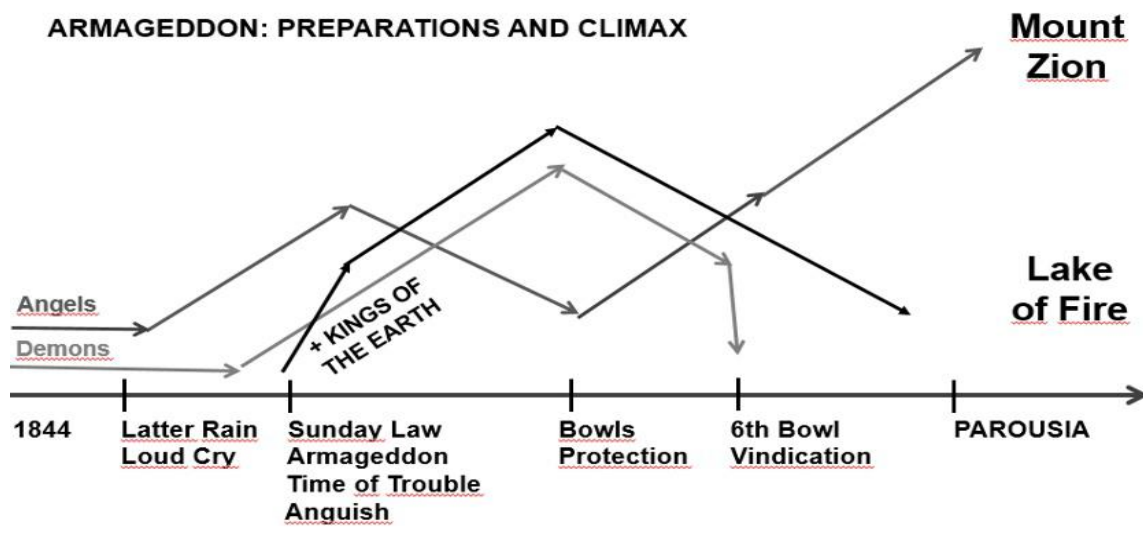
Therefore, if the battle of Armageddon starts *before* the plagues, with the rise of the “image of the beast” (Rev 13:15), it is plausible to conclude that this very final battle is referred to in different visions in Revelation (12:17; 13:4, 7, 16; 16:14; 17:14; 19:19). Starting before the plagues, this battle extends until the sixth plague, when the coalition of the enemies is destroyed (see the chart). In all these texts, John uses the Greek verb πολεμέω or the noun

³⁷³ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 160, italics mine.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

πόλεμος to speak of the “battle” between the saints and their enemies, which creates a verbal parallel between the referred visions.

The relation between Revelation 16:16 and 19:19 is drawn under the assumption that the final battle occurs at the Parousia. However, the battle reported in Revelation 19:19 is also described in 17:14 and its timing is before the Parousia while the harlot is still persecuting God’s people. Only after that battle (Rev 17:14) John describes her destruction by the kings in 17:16 and chapter 18. The expression the “beast and the kings of the earth” is mentioned twice, in Revelation 17:14-16 and 19:19. In both visions they fight against the “Lord of lords and King of kings” and his army (Rev 17:14; 19:16). Aune says that the “kings of the whole world” (16:14) are often identified with the “ten kings” in 17:12-14, 16-17.³⁷⁵



In this perspective, the final battle would start before the plagues, with the issuance of a decree against the law of God sustained by the remnant (Rev 12:17; 13:16-17). This law has to do exactly with whom is worthy to receive worship, either God the creator or the beast. This

³⁷⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 895.

clearly reminds us of Mount Carmel when the Ahab's kingdom supported Baal's worship against Elijah's ministry.

Thus, this religious or spiritual battle would be anachronistic if it took place after the sixth plague, when all of the earth's inhabitants have taken their decision about who they should worship. The view of an Armageddon as a spiritual war not a military one, focused on the Sabbath issue as a day of worship to the true creator God and its eschatological implications, fits well with Carmel event as a background of this battle. In that Old Testament mount, the prophet of God as a remnant prophet faced his opponents who were trying to drive the people to worship the false god Baal. Elijah restored the altar of God in the presence of Baal's prophets. Before all Israel, Elijah sustained the truth and the worship to the only creator God. In this sense he is a prototype of those, represented by the three angels of Revelation 14, who will sustain the worship to the true and only creator God before the whole world even though under counterfeiting by the part of the demons, and opposition and persecution by the part of the kings of the earth.

Armageddon in this line seems better to find its proper meaning as a religious war between God and the devil, between truth and sin, between the true worship and its falsification. That last war for the mind will lead the people on earth to assume their final position regarding the universal drama depicted in Revelation.

CHAPTER 7

DEMONS' SIGNS AND SPIRITUALISM

The “three demons” that come out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet have the task to attract the kings in favor of Babylon in the last battle against God’s people. They perform “signs” (Rev 16:14) in order to reach their purpose. Those signs to deceive people are mentioned in Revelation four times. Twice it is said that the second beast make “great signs” to “deceive those who dwells on the earth” (13:13, 14). Signs are performed by the three demons to “gather the kings” (16:14). Then the “signs” are referred to again when John describes the beast and the false prophet being captured to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20).

By mentioning the beast and the kings “gathered together to make war” against the Word of God (Rev 19:19), John links the three passages (Rev 19:19-20; 16:14; 13:13, 14), suggesting that the “signs” of the false prophet and the signs of the demons are the same wonders done in the same context.³⁷⁶ This literary unity is highlighted by mentioning the “signs” (Greek σημεῖα) and the “gathering” (from Greek verb συνάγω).

The meaning of the “signs” performed by the false prophet and the demons as well as the connections of those signs in the context of Revelation and in the New Testament are very important issues in understanding John’s visions about Armageddon. In this chapter we

³⁷⁶ Beale says that “these demons are ‘doing signs (ποιοῦντα σημεῖα),’ which identifies them further with the work of the deceptive agents of ch. 13” (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 834).

discuss the implications of that work of the demons in performing signs to gather the kings to Armageddon. The signs of the demons are seen here as depicting the spreading of Spiritualism in the last days.

Signs and Deception

The two main aspects of the spirits in Revelation 16:13-14 is that they are unclean like frogs and perform signs. These two features are the way to understand what John has to communicate about them. A very important issue in the context of Revelation 16 is that those signs are connected to the signs of the second beast in Revelation 13.

The description of those spirits unclean like frogs point to their uncleanness in contrast to the holy nature of the worship of God which is a central motif in Revelation 13-19. Israel were told to worship God in holiness (Lev 11:44, 45, 19:2; 20:7). The uncleanness of the spirits “alludes to their being ceremonially unclean and thus anathema in this setting of worship” (cf. Lev 11:10-11). In Revelation, this uncleanness is reinforced in the “blasphemy that comes from the mouth of the frogs in the form of propaganda on behalf of the trinity of evil—the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.”³⁷⁷ The fact they are “unclean” (ἀκάθαρτα) suggests “their deceptive nature.” In Revelation 17:4, the adjective ἀκάθαρτα and ἀκαθάρτου in 18:2-3 are “linked with Babylon’s deceptive immorality, and the same connection is made with ‘unclean’ (κοινὸν)” in 21:27, which has no part in the new earth.³⁷⁸ Stefanovic says that “uncleanness is indeed the characteristic of the end-time Babylon,” that is directly linked to those three spirits. Babylon is full of “abominations and the unclean things of her fornication”

³⁷⁷ Yattes, *Revelation*, 295.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 831.

(cf. Rev 17:4), therefore she is the “dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit” (Rev 18:2).³⁷⁹ This relation between the spirits and Babylon, from the viewpoint that both are unclean and therefore anathema in the setting of worship stress the dangerous of their work in deviating the people from the worship to the true God. This true and holy worship is promoted by the three divine angels of Revelation 14.

Besides, the resemblance of frogs recalls the work of the magicians in Egypt. According to Exodus 8:7, the Egyptian magicians “managed to produce frogs.” Lupieri recalls that “this is, therefore, a plague that the forces of evil can manage.”³⁸⁰ In Greek text of Exodus 8:7, those “magicians” are called φάρμακος which were prohibited as “abomination” by the law of God (Deut 18:1-12). So, the abominable magicians were able to produce abominable frogs, which are uncleanness, by imitating the work of God through Moses. In the same manner what the unclean spirits produce in Revelation is uncleanness, something contrary to holiness. Their signs and works are deceptive. Lupieri considers that Revelation, with the imagery of frogs, shows a clear “link” between the “unclean spirits” and “idolatrous paganism and Satan himself.”³⁸¹ Beale says that perhaps John chose frogs to talk about those demons because that was “one of the two Egyptian plagues that Pharaoh’s magicians were able to reproduce through their deceptive arts” (Exo. 8:7), and this stress their “deceptive influence” in the end time.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 499.

³⁸⁰ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 243.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 243.

³⁸² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 832.

In this line, Stefanovic highlights that “the three frog-like demons of the sixth plague are Satan’s last attempt to counterfeit the work of God, for they appear to be the evil counterpart of the three angels of Revelation 14.” Moreover, “the message they send to the earth dwellers is the antitheses of the warning message proclaimed by the three angels.”³⁸³ This stress their unclean nature in contrast to the divine nature of the three angels.

The second feature of the spirits like frogs is that they perform signs (σημεῖα). In Revelation this noun is sometimes used of the elements of visions that John receives (12:1, 3; 15:1), but four times also for false miracles (13:13, 14; 16:14; 19:20) performed by evil powers. That is “a sharp contrast with the Fourth Gospel where it is a characteristic word for the miracles of Jesus.”³⁸⁴ This point highlights the nature of falsification of the work of those demons. Stefanovic says that “the frog-like demons proceed from the mouth of the satanic trinity” are “Satan’s powerful agents of propaganda who will make persuasive deceptions in the final battle.” He adds that this campaign of the demons “clearly reminds us of Revelation 13:13-14,” with the same work by the part of the false prophet. “Miraculous signs are a part of Satan’s end-time deception to persuade people to side with the satanic trinity rather than the true God.”³⁸⁵ He argues even that “the works of the false prophet and the earth beast are identical.” Also, he recalls that “the earth beast is no longer mentioned in the book after chapter 13 but is referred to as the false prophet—a member of the satanic trinity.”³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 500.

³⁸⁴ Morris, *Revelation*, 166.

³⁸⁵ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 500.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 495.

This reasoning calls attention to the fact that the eschatological moment when the false prophet and the unclean spirits perform their works is the same one.³⁸⁷ Indeed, those signs are performed by the same entity.

In Revelation 13 the signs lead the people to make an “image to the beast.” The Greek phrases ποιεῖ σημεῖα (“makes signs,” 13:13, NAS) and ποιῆσαι εἰκόνα (“make an image,” 13:14) are literary in parallel and indicate that the purposes of the “signs” is persuade people to build the “image” of the beast. The phrase “those who dwell on the earth” (κατοικοῦσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) indicate that the land beast campaign is driven to the whole world. Thus, the signs precede the emergence of the image of the beast on earth. Accordingly, in Revelation 16 the signs drive “the kings of the whole world” (τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης) to get “gathered together” in favor of Babylon. In this sense, the *building* of the image of the beast is correlate to the *gathering* of the kings. Both campaigns are driven to the whole world by the part of the false prophet in Revelation 13 and the three demons like frogs in Revelation 16.

Osborne argues that a major focus of the work of the false prophet in Revelation 13:13, 14 is to perform σημεῖα μεγάλα (“great signs”), “the counterfeit miracles that mirror those of Elijah and Christ as well as the two witness of 11:5-6.” Moreover, Moses was described as “a prophet who performed such miracles signs” (cf. Exod 4:17; 7:9-10; 10:1-2), and Elijah and Elisha were justly “famed for the spectacular miracles God produced through them.”³⁸⁸ This

³⁸⁷ Thomas also argues that “in Rev 16:14 these demonic spirits do signs, like the beast from the earth, the false prophet, did earlier to deceive the inhabitants of the earth (13:13-14), bearing a striking resemblance to the spirits that must be tested to determine whether they be from the Spirit of Truth or the spirit of deception (1 John 4:1-6)” (Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 482).

³⁸⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 513.

highlights the work of the demons with the clear intension to imitate and counterfeit the true signs of the servants of God.

In this context, Thomas says that the “conditioned nature of ‘signs’ within the Johannine Community” and “the doing of great signs by this beast again underscores the way in which he continues to parody the activity of the Spirit.” He argues that the extent of this beast’s ability is demonstrated by the fact that he is even able to make “fire fall from heaven unto the earth before men.” This reference to fire from heaven is specifically regarded to Elijah, “whose sacrifice was consumed by fire that fell from the Lord” (cf. 1 Kgs 18:38). Thus, Thomas says, “this beast [from the land] is able to do what the prophets of Baal could not, in imitation of Elijah.” At the same time, the reference is to the “two prophetic witnesses from whose mouth fire came to devour their enemies.” He concludes that “as such, the actions of this beast reveal his continued parody of the work of the Spirit.”

Besides that, the attribution of many great signs to this land beast also likely calls to the mind the words of Deuteronomy 13:1-5, “which warn of a ‘prophet’ who perform signs or wonders and leads the people to worship other gods.”³⁸⁹ Thomas argues that the purpose of these great signs, and the fire falling from heaven in particular, is deceiving those who dwell upon the earth by means of the signs which had been given to him to do before the beast, “saying to those who dwell upon the earth to make an icon/image to the beast.”³⁹⁰ This image will result in worshiping false gods. To make images and worship them transgress the second commandment of the law of God (cf. Exod 20:4-5).

³⁸⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 400.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 401.

In this regard, Thomas goes on to say that the first readers of Revelation easily would understand that this “deceive language” alludes to the false prophetess “Jezebel” who “teaches and deceive my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (Rev 2:20), activities directly connected to idolatry. They easily would also connect this false prophet to “the agent of deception *par excellence*, the great dragon, the one who stands behind all the human agents of deception” (cf. Rev 12:9).³⁹¹

Accordingly, Stefanovic highlights that the purpose of the “end-time miraculous deception” performed by the three frogs-like demons is to persuade people (cf. Rev 13:13-14; 20:7-9). The satanic trinity sends “three demonic angels with the false gospel to persuade the secular and political authorities and powers of the world to side with them against God and his people for the great day of God Almighty.” He concludes that “it appears that spiritualism will become part of the final deception that is to sweep the world.”³⁹² Thomas also argues that the spirits of demons point to spiritualism in the context of false worship. “The identification of these unclean spirits as demonic spirits may assist the [readers] in assessing the nature of the worship of demons that the rest of humankind refused to turn from and repent in 9:20-21.”³⁹³

In this context, Stefanovic comes to say that “the main role in gathering forces to Armageddon, according to Revelation 16:13, will be played by the false prophet.” His point is that the false prophet is the leader in that campaign of counterfeiting as is depicted in Revelation 13:11-18.³⁹⁴ Morris states that a clear point regarding the spirits like frogs is that

³⁹¹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 401.

³⁹² Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 500.

³⁹³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 482.

³⁹⁴ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 497.

they are like the “lying spirit” who was to entice Ahab into battle (1 Kgs 22:21-ff). “But instead of enticing one man, these have the much greater task of enticing the whole world into battle.”³⁹⁵

Therefore, the literary context of the last battle in Revelation indicates that this battle will result from the influence of religious priests over the political rulers, the “kings.” The work of the demons as well as the false prophet’s point to the influence of spiritualism in the end time to lead the world into a war against the true God.

When will this kind of spiritualism start its work to deceive people? This is an important question regarding the last events depicted in Revelation. The ultimate goal of this deception is to persuade the kings of the whole world to support Babylon’s cause against God. The work of the demons precedes the gathering of kings and their support to the demons’ cause. Thus, the influence of spiritualism in the last days precedes the union between church and state.

Signs and the Second Beast

The relations already built between the signs by the three demons (Rev 16:14) and the signs by the false prophet (Rev 13:14) are very important in dealing with the time and nature of Armageddon. Since the “false prophet” is considered as an unfolding of the second beast, this connection may indicate the specific moment when those signs are performed and their results in terms of gathering the kings on earth to the battle of Armageddon.

Meanwhile, Beale highlights the connection between those entities (false prophet and the demons) by considering that the concept of imitation and parody is behind both of them.

³⁹⁵ Morris, *Revelation*, 192.

According to him, “the idea of the second beast as a counterfeit imitation is carried on” in Revelation 13:13, since “his activities are described by an ironic echo of the acts of Moses, whose prophetic authority was validated by ‘great signs’.”³⁹⁶ This idea of counterfeit is also attributed to the spirits like frogs who perform signs in the same way of that by the part of the Egyptian magicians in imitating the works of Moses.

The identity and role of the second beast in Revelation is a topic of great discussion among the scholars. From a preterist perspective, Charles says that the first beast is to be identified with the “Nero redivivus” legend. About the second beast (Rev 13:11), he considers as a representation of “the priesthood of the imperial cultus in Asia Minor.”³⁹⁷ In a traditional historicist viewpoint, these symbols are applied throughout the ages to the “the sacerdotal persecuting power, pagan or Christian,” which works with Roman papacy, “though by no means limiting it to this priesthood.”³⁹⁸ In an idealistic view, Johnson considers that “the land beast is John’s way of describing the false prophets of the Olivet Discourse” (cf. Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22). According to him, “the land beast is the antithesis to the true prophets of Christ

³⁹⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 708. Cf. Exo. 4:17, 30; 10:2; 11:10.

³⁹⁷ Robert Henry Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 357. Krodel says that just as Jesus’ prophets perform miracles (cf. Rev 11:5-6; cf. 2 Cor 12:12), so “does the pseudo prophet of the beast” (cf. Mark 13:22). “Aping the *great signs* of Elijah (cf. 11:5)” he does make “fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men and with their miracles they deceive those who dwell on earth (v. 13-14).” And like the magicians as Pharaoh’s court (Exod 7:11), “the false prophet imitates the miracles of God’s servants” (Krodel, *Revelation*, 254). Although that, he understands that the “second beast represents Roman proconsuls of the province of Asia, the local political authorities, and also the ‘philosophers,’ orators, and priests of the emperor cult who function as propaganda organs on behalf of Antichrist” (Krodel, *Revelation*, 254). Aune considers the “identity of the beast from the earth” problematic. He thinks that John could have “in mind a specific contemporary individual or institution that promotes the imperial cult,” like “the Roman emperor himself,” but at the same time he sees the “aspect of the eschatological-antagonist myth that anticipates the coming of a false prophet at the end” (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 756).

³⁹⁸ Cf. Johnson, “Revelation,” 530.

symbolized by the two witness in chapter 11.³⁹⁹ Besides, in Berkouwer's line,⁴⁰⁰ Johnson considers that the first beast (Rev 13:1) either represents "a power or a movement, or describes a human being allied with the antichrist at the close of the age."⁴⁰¹ However, Berkouwer was more specific. He understood that the antichrist would be "a concretely human person," the "man of lawlessness," who will be slayed by the Parousia of the Lord.⁴⁰² Evidently, Johnson neither Berkouwer realize that the beasts stand for political entities like ancient Babylon, Mede-Persia, and Greece as explained by the angel interpreter to Daniel (Dan 7:17, 18).

In an idealistic similar line of thought, Custer emphasize the imitative nature of the second beast as a false prophet. This is very clear represented in his two horns like a lamb. He says that the second beast is "a counterfeit ... masquerading" as a "Christ figure." Accordingly, "as Christ received authority from the Father (Matt 11:27), so the antichrist receives authority from the dragon (Rev 13:4); and as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:14), so the false prophet glorifies the antichrist (Rev 13:12)." Concluding, Custer says the false prophet is "the Minister of Propaganda" to the first beast.⁴⁰³

Though his preterist perspective in general, Lupieri highlights the counterfeit aspect of the second beast as "an imitation of the prophetic and religious function of the Spirit." He stresses that "the aspect of the false spirituality is already apparent [in Rev 13:12-13), and in fact it is characterized by its deceptiveness (it is a 'dragon' disguised as a 'lamb'), by its power

³⁹⁹ Johnson, "Revelation," 530.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 260-270.

⁴⁰¹ Johnson, "Revelation," 529.

⁴⁰² Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, p, 270.

⁴⁰³ Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise*, 151.

of speech, and by its priestly function.” So, the false prophet resembles a work pretended to be performed by the Holy Spirit. Lupieri also stress that the false prophet performs Elijah’s miracle “which had cultic significance: Elijah made fire come down from heaven to consume the sacrificial animal” (cf. 1 Kgs 18:20-40).⁴⁰⁴ In this point, the false prophet’s role is clearly connected to a counterfeited worship in Christianity. According to him, “this is the ancient sin of Aaron, the first priest of Israel, who led the people to idolatry in the desert by making [the image] of a golden calf and establishing it as an object of worship” (cf. Exod 32:2-6). The resulting “image of the beast” receives worship as the golden calf in the ancient desert. Thus, he concludes that the second beast as a false prophet is “a religious power in the service of the political and military power.”⁴⁰⁵

Meanwhile, in dealing with the picture of the second beast in Revelation 13:11, the first thing to consider is that this monster has “two horns like a lamb.” This is the initial point that John describes about the symbol. This feature recalls Daniel 8 where the lamb with two horns stands for Mede-Persian Empire. Probably, what John wants to communicate with this symbol is that, like in Daniel, the lamb beast could point to a power with two different entities depicted in his two horns.⁴⁰⁶ He even indicates that by the two group of verbs (actions) used in his account of this beast. John employs the verbs to describe two different kinds of actions of this symbol in two different phases. At first, after describing the symbol, he says that the land

⁴⁰⁴ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 209.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁰⁶ By ignoring this intertextual allusion by John to Daniel 8, Krodel considers that “in contrast to the beast from the sea which is a composite of diverse traditions, the *beast* from the *earth* was John’s own creation. The hippopotamus-like land monster Behemoth of Job 40 (cf. 1 Eno 60:7-10) did not lend any feature to John’s earth beast” (Krodel, *Revelation*, 253).

beast “causes the earth to *worship* the first beast” (v. 12), he “*performs* great signs” (v. 13), he “*deceives* those who dwell on the earth” (v. 14), and finally he does “*give breath* to the image of the beast” (v. 15, italics mine). These actions are of a religious nature and they are proper of a false prophet.⁴⁰⁷ The mention of those very *signs* “in the presence” of the beast attributed to the “false prophet” (Rev 19:20) confirms this reading. The signs are the main work of the land beast in the first phase of his performance as a “false prophet.”

Then, from v. 15, a second symbol is placed in view, the “image of the beast.” When the dead beast recalls breath (through the false prophet), what comes to life is not the first beast itself, but his “image.” In this context, we can see the second group of actions that take place in Revelation 13:11-18. The “image of the beast” can “*speak* and *cause* as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be *killed*” (v. 15), it “*causes* all ... to receive a mark” of the beast (v. 16), and finally he *exercises* such a civil control “that no one may buy or sell” except those who have the mark of the beast (v. 17). Now, by those actions the second beast is working no longer as a “false prophet,” but as an “image of the beast;” from v. 15 on he starts his phase as a *political entity*. The earth beast, thus, “functions as an exclusively end-time world power.”⁴⁰⁸

Therefore, as occurs in Daniel, the two-horned beast in Revelation 13 depicts a power that unfolds itself in two different powers. By his two horns, the land beast depicts two

⁴⁰⁷ Rotz defends also that “in v. 13, the land beast fulfills the warning of a false prophet who would lead the people to worship other gods by performing *great and miraculous signs*” (cf. Deut 13:1-2; Matt 24:23-25; Mark 13:21-23; 2 Thess 2:9-10). He adds that “the sea beast speaks blasphemies but the land beast’s speech is more subtle. He is a ‘false prophet’ (16:13; 19:20; 20:10) who, like the Nicolaitans (2:6, 15) and Jezebel (2:20) deceives and tries to persuade the church to follow the dragon” (Rotz, *Revelation*, 206).

⁴⁰⁸ Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 159.

entities, named the “false prophet” and the “image of the beast,” or the religious power who perform signs, and the political entity that can kill the people, since he received breath through the false prophet. Both entities are recalled further in Revelation as distinct (14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2, 13; 19:19, 20; 20:4, 10). A confirmation of this reading can be seen in the fact that the false prophet “makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast” (Rev 13:12) and further to worship the “image of the beast” (19:20). By its turn, the image of the beast “cause[s] as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev 13:15).

The Phases of the Second Beast

Since the first beast and his image can be put in sequence (Rev 13:1, 15), the role of the false prophet and of the image of the beast are different and also consecutive. What the false prophet intends but cannot do by using the religious power the image of the beast reaches by using the political and enforcing power. Therefore, in Revelation 13, we have two visions, with the actuation of the “first beast” in the first vision and of the “image of the beast” in the second one. In Revelation 13, the performance of the “false prophet” is a kind of transition between the slain of the “first beast” and his resurrection through the “image of the beast.” The false prophet gives “breath” to the image. What was died is the first beast (Rev 3, 9), but what arises after receiving breath through the false prophet is an image of the beast (13:14, 15). The actuation of the false prophet has three different and sequential phases in this account: (1) he “causes” those who dwell on the earth to “worship the beast” (13:12); (2) he “performs” great signs to deceive those who dwell on the earth “to make an image to the beast” (13:13-14); and (3) he “gives breath” to the image of the beast in order this image kill those who don’t worship the “image of the beast” (13:15). Accordingly, since the “image of

the beast” is alive, what is worshiped is no longer the “beast,” but his “image.” Thus, the image replaces the beast.

We may say that the actuation of the false prophet is also divided in two others phases: (1) He actuates alone to make the people of the earth to worship the beast. (2) He calls the image of the beast to join him in this task. The difference among those two entities is that the false prophet only performs signs. This is his instrument of persuasion. But the image of the beast has the power to kill and mark the people. In this base, we may say that the campaign depicted in Revelation 13:11-18 has two moments: (1) firstly, there is an initial phase of a “war” only in religious affairs with the actuation of the false prophet alone in making people to worship the beast. (2) This “war” becomes tenser when the image of the beast enters into the battle. Thus, the emergence of the “image” with his power to enforce by law the counterfeit worship is preceded by the actuation of the religious power of the false prophet alone.

In Revelation 16:13-14, this same sequence is also suggested. In fact, John says that the demons like frogs “gathered them [the kings] together to *the* place” which in Hebrew is called Armageddon (NAS, Rev 16:16). The use of the Greek definite article before “place” (τὸν τόπον, Rev 16:16) indicates that in John’s mind “Armageddon” was a known place or one already mentioned. It is possible that he was thinking in the Mount Carmel which was a well-known mountain or the region of the Valley of Meggido. But this would be a more literal understanding of the passage in this specific point. Probably, he had in mind the “battle” as a kind of “warfare mountain,” the very war that he had mentioned many times in Revelation from chapter 9, and 12-14, but especially in 13:11-14. In this perspective, the kings which are the political powers of the earth, with the demons’ appeal, will ingress into a war that has been

already fought until then only by the religious powers. The political ingress in this religious war result in making laws against the remnant.

In this perspective, Armageddon may be seen as a battle that is clear connected to the three angels and the restoration of the true worship on earth with the rescue of the seventh-day Sabbath, the memorial of creation (Rev 14:6-7). If Paulien is correct (and he is) in stating that the two campaigns of proclamations by the part of three angels and the three demons “go out to the world *side by side*,”⁴⁰⁹ we may say that at least the preparations for Armageddon started with the restoration of the seal of God, the Sabbath as memorial and the sign of the creator God. Paulien also highlights that the work of counterfeiting “seeks to confuse those who hear the true gospel.”⁴¹⁰ Since “Armageddon” (the mountain of Meggido) is an allusion to the Mount Carmel, the battle for the mind of the people to drive them to worship the true God creator instead the evil trinity has begun since the beginning of Sabbath’s restoration in Christianity, from 1844.⁴¹¹

John says also that the second beast “exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence” (13:12). Thus, the second beast replaces the first one by exercising his authority. Aune highlights that the phrase ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, literary “before him, in his presence,” really means “by his authority,” “on his behalf,” or even “at his commissioning.” This happens because “the first beast is never referred to in v. 11-18 in an active way.” Who is active is the false prophet and the image of the beast. There is no verb indicating any action by the part of

⁴⁰⁹ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 160, italics mine.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁴¹¹ Stefanovic states that “as the Sabbath was the sign of God’s people in biblical times (Edo 31:12-17; Ezek 20:12, 20), so it will be the sign of loyalty to God in the final crisis (Rev 13:16-17)” (Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 94).

the first beast in this context of the end time. What the text is meaning is that “the second beast performs miracles ἐνώπιον τοῦ θηρίου, ‘by the authority of the beast’” (cf. 13;14). Aune adds that “this expression appears to have been formulated by the author in antithesis” to the way in which this preposition is normally used in Revelation, that is, “with reference to the presence of God.”⁴¹² Thus, the false prophet performs his signs as if they were doing “in the presence of God” (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ) that is how the preposition is used many times (cf. 3:2; 8:2, 4; 9:13; 11:16; 12:10; 16:19).⁴¹³ So, Aune emphasizes, “that the second beast or the false prophet performs miracles *in the presence of* the beast hints at a priestly role for the false prophet.”⁴¹⁴

In trying to interpret the identity of the false prophet, Johnson recalls that “the fire of God” should be connected to “the true word of God and the Holy Spirit’s witness,” such as at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). Thus, “the false fire [given by the false prophet] would then be a reference to pseudo-charismatic gifts that create a counterfeit church community whose allegiance is to the Antichrist.”⁴¹⁵ This reasoning is very insightful in the attempt to identify who and where the false prophet operates, because a supposed gift of the Holy Spirit is vindicated by some Christians since the beginning of the 20th century—in America!

In this same line, Rotz considers that the “fire” associated with the false prophet and the two witness (11:15) has “both the motivation and the results” very different. “The witness

⁴¹² Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 757-758.

⁴¹³ The preposition is also used as ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου [τοῦ θεοῦ], “before the throne [of God]” (1:4; 4:5, 6, 10; 7:9, 11, 15; 8:3; 14:3; 20:12), ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου, “before the one seated on the throne” (4:10), ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου, “before the Lord” (11:4), ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρός μου, “before my Father” (3:5), and ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου, “before the Lamb” (5:8; 7:9; 14:10). All the passages are talking about the place of the presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary.

⁴¹⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 758.

⁴¹⁵ Johnson, “Revelation,” 531.

mediate God's judgment while the land beast seeks to frighten people into a blasphemous alliance with the 'beast'." Later in the narrative, "fire falls from heaven, signaling judgment of the army surrounding Jerusalem (20:9)." He also believes that "an interesting alternative perspective is that the *fire* imitates the fiery tongues associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit."⁴¹⁶ Johnson adds that the "the fire from heaven" also recalls the ancient priests Nadab and Abihu, who offered "unauthorized fire" before the Lord, "apparently by their own self-will, and received God's judgment in the form of 'fire' that 'consumed them'" (cf. Lev 10:1-2). Curiously, "the two witness were also said to receive 'breath'" which is πνεῦμα (cf. Rev 11:11).⁴¹⁷

Therefore, as a false prophet the land beast imitates the work of God's prophets and the two witness as well. In this manner he depicts the work of spiritualism in the times in imitating the work of the Holy Spirit through pseudo-charismatism. But as an "image of the beast" he exercises power of coercion and death like the first beast. In general, the commentators refer to the land beast as the false prophet.⁴¹⁸ However, the symbol is more complex than of a simple prophet like Balaam in Revelation 2:14. His animal features and monstrosity require the land

⁴¹⁶ Rotz, *Revelation*, 207. Stefanovic also understands that "the beast bringing fire down from heaven also counterfeits the day of Pentecost when tongues of fire came down from heaven upon the disciples (Acts 2:3)" (Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 161).

⁴¹⁷ Johnson, "Revelation," 531, 532.

⁴¹⁸ Knight, for example, says that "the false prophet is presumably the second beast of 13:11-17." With these mythical creatures (beast, land beast, and evil spirits) he understands that John is pointing out to the "prelude to their final destruction." In this context, "their deceitful character is heavily emphasized." "The spirit that comes from their mouths is called a 'foul spirit,' which means a 'lying spirit.' One thinks here of the 'spirit of falsehood' that features in the Qumran literature (see IQS 3:13-4:1). As in the gospels, evil spirits are connected with the opponents of Jesus and his followers. There are further parallels with 1 John 4:3 which speaks of 'the spirit of the antichrist'" (Knight, *Revelation*, 121).

beast be understood as a symbol of a political entity, specifically in his second phase as an “image of the beast,” as we have shown.

Besides, Paulien comes to highlight that the unclean spirits play “two roles in the battle of Armageddon: persuasion and agents of miraculous signs.” By his turn, the land beast performs miraculous signs. Both “use miracles to persuade the whole world to worship themselves rather than the true God.” Thus, the final goal of the signs is to persuade the political and civil world. He concludes that the three frogs as “the evil counterpart of God’s three angels” (cf. Rev 14:6-12) present a “counterfeit gospel to the whole world.”⁴¹⁹ Thus, performing of signs and the resulting counterfeited gospel point to a pseudo-charismatic movement as Johnson and Rotz highlight.

The final goal of the signs by both false prophet and the demons is to enter into the political arena in order to influence the rulers, depicted as “kings” in Revelation. Paulien still calls attention to the union between the two forms of power, religious and political. He insists that there are two “trinities” and two sets of messengers (three angels and three frogs) that “go out into the world during the final battle.” In this context, there is a strong competition among the two groups, as messengers of two different gospels. Paulien considers that

To the degree that God’s three angels (14:6-12) reach the world, the forces of evil will have a hard time. On the other hand, if the demonic trinity succeeds in uniting all the nations of the earth under their leadership, the final struggle of the saints will be all the more difficult. When the civil and secular powers of the world lend their powers to the demonic trinity, the stage is set for the final battle.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 140.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

This reasoning is so crucial in Armageddon setting. There is no last battle until the kings or political entities are engaged with the demons, or false prophet. However, all the efforts of both “false prophet” and “demons” is to bring the “kings” to their side in the spiritual war. The false prophet needs to breath spirit into the dead beast. And the demons need to gather the kings. These two results are the same and one: the union between church and state to the final struggle. Osborne stress that the “empire” of the beast at the end of history is thus connected to “demonic forces to lead the pagans into worshipping the wrong gods.” They only can accomplish this plan by “doing signs” (ποιούντα σημεῖα, Rev 16:14) to persuade the secular world.⁴²¹ LaRondelle says that John emphasizes the “coercive nature” of the false worship by means of the political enforcing of a “mark of the beast” (cf. Rev 19:20; 13:16).⁴²²

Thus, the second beast has two phases of his actuation. Firstly, he acts as a false prophet and his mainly role is to perform signs to deceive people to worship the beast and make an image of the beast. He communicates breath to the image of the beast in order this image can enter into action as the political coercive power in the last crisis. This image replaces the role of the first beast and exercises power over the world to mark the people as worshipers of the beast. This moment of tension by the engaging of the political powers in the religious battle will carry the conflict of Armageddon to its climax.

⁴²¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 592.

⁴²² LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 150.

The Three Demons and the Demonic Cavalry

The eschatological aspect of the three demons as performers of miracles signs highlights the clear connection between Revelation 16:14 e 13:13-14 as we have shown. The false prophet is also a performer of miracles to deceive people in the end time. In this line, the work of the demons and the false prophet may be considered as the same spiritual event previewed by Revelation. An eschatological work of deception by the part of demons performing signs to enroll the wicked world against God is also suggested by Paul the apostle. According to the Scriptures, that work of deception is allowed by God himself in the time of the end. This work of demons allowed by God is also connected to spiritualism depicted by the cavalry in the fifth and sixth trumpet in Revelation 9, as understood by many commentators.

Aune highlights that the miracles worked by the false prophet (13:14) referred to again in 19:20 are the same ones of the demonic spirits that came from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (16:14). Thus, the signs link together these “eschatological scenarios.”⁴²³ Moreover, according to him, “the performance of miracles by the eschatological antagonist links this passage closely to 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10.”⁴²⁴ Paul says that “the coming of the *lawless* one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth.”

Besides, Aune explains that the phrase ἐδόθη αὐτῷ (Rev 13:14), literally “it was given to him,” though more idiomatically translated “he was permitted,” is another occurrence of the

⁴²³ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 759.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

passivum divinum or “divine passive,” used as “a circumlocution for the name of God.” Thus, God allows the second beast to perform those signs. This same concept is presented in Paul’s passage when he says, “God will *send* them strong delusion” (2 Thess 2:11, italics mine). Aune argues that the “eschatological antagonist” will perform signs and wonders, and because that those driving to destruction will believe in this falsification. He emphasizes that “God sends the power of deceit to them so that they might believe the falsehood.”⁴²⁵

Moreover, Paul’s passage about the lawless, as “sent by God,” drives the attention back to Revelation where the eschatological work of deception by the part of the three demons and the false prophet also is linked with the work of the demonic cavalry, as depicted in the trumpets account. In Revelation 9, the abyss is opened by a key *given* by an angel coming down from heaven which indicates the divine permission to the work of the demonic locusts and cavalry.

Trumpets as Judgments Sent by God

The narrative of the seven trumpets are broadly discussed by the interpreters. From the futuristic perspective, it is considered as eschatological and divine judgments over the wicked world, in general as literal and sequential. Those judgments are initiated with the seals (Rev 6; 8:1), then follow with the trumpets (8:7-9:21; 11:15-19), and finish with the bowls (16:1-21).⁴²⁶ This dislocation of those judgments to the end time, however, does not deviate the perception of the fifth and seventh trumpets as judgments through the sending of full activities by the part of demons just before the end.

⁴²⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 760-761.

⁴²⁶ See Osborne, *Revelation*, 339-ff.

Meanwhile, in another perspective of understanding the trumpets are seen as judgments inflicted by God during the Christian age. Their purpose in this line is to affect the enemies of God's people throughout the history in response to the prayers of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10.⁴²⁷ Paulien argues that "trumpets became increasingly associated with judgment in the centuries immediately preceding the composition of Revelation." He emphasizes that "the theme of judgment is pervasive in the introduction to the seven trumpets."⁴²⁸

In this context, Beale argues that the voice from the altar in Revelation 9:13 is a link between the angels released at the sixth trumpet and those at the corners of the earth also released in the predetermined moment of judgments after the sealing of the servants of God (7:1). The voice coming "from the four corners of the golden altar that is before God" suggests the work of intercession before God. This voice starts the content of the sixth trumpet. Beale considers that this may be Christ's voice. With the mention of the altar, Revelation 9:13 "ties the sixth trumpet judgment in further with the saints' prayers for retribution in 6:10-11 and 8:3-5, the latter of which is the first formal development of the prayers from ch. 6."⁴²⁹ This linkage shows that "the seven trumpets were God's response to the saints' petition."⁴³⁰ Beale recalls that, though ἐνώπιον ("before," "in the presence") occurs many times in Revelation, "it appears seven times in connection with explicit reference to some aspect of God's presence in

⁴²⁷ According to Stefanovic, "the seven trumpets refer to God's intervention in history in response to the prayers of his oppressed people" (Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 104).

⁴²⁸ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 224.

⁴²⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 506.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

the heavenly *temple*.”⁴³¹ Thus, the trumpets should be seen as God’s response to the saints by sending judgments over the enemies who martyr them.

Stefanovic argues that “in both the Old and New Testament, the blowing of trumpets symbolizes the intervention of God in history.”⁴³² He also attests that the seventh trumpet announce the coming of God’s kingdom, and it is clearly sounded at the end of human kingdoms.⁴³³ Indeed, Revelation 10:7 says that in “the days of the sound of the seventh trumpet angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God will be completed.”⁴³⁴ Paulien adds that “the climax of the seven trumpets comes with the eschatological enthronement of Christ over the nations” in Revelation 11:15-18. He argues that this passage is “rooted verbally and thematically” in Exodus 15:18, “where Yahweh is said to reign forever and ever as a result of the crossing of the sea.”⁴³⁵ This is when the trumpets finish in the end of time.

However, when did they start? Stefanovic highlights that the “introductory scene” of the trumpets report showing the altar of sacrifice and the altar of incense helps us to place their start in the historical time. Based in the *Mishnah Tamid* 4.1-5.6, he recalls that, in the Hebrew temple, the sacrificial lamb was done “upon the altar of burnt offering” and the blood of the sacrifice was poured out “at the base of the altar.” After that, “the assigned priest would have taken the golden incense censor inside the temple and offered incense upon the golden altar in

⁴³¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 506.

⁴³² Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 281.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 285-86.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁴³⁵ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 227.

the holy place.” During that, the people were in prayer outside the temple. When the priest went out to bless the people, “the seven priests blew their trumpets, marking the end of the daily sacrifice ceremony.”⁴³⁶ This whole process of intercession recalled by the trumpet introductory scene in Revelation 8:2-6 helps us to locate in time the scene of the blowing of the seven trumpets.⁴³⁷ He concludes that “the seven trumpet blasts clearly follow Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.”⁴³⁸ Aune agrees that “the series of the seven trumpets plagues narrated in 8:7-9:21 and 11:15-18 is introduced with a scene in the heavenly temple in 8:2-6.” He attests that this introductory scene, like that one which precedes the seven seals in 4:1-5:14 and the seven bowls in 15:1-8, “is set in the heavenly temple.”⁴³⁹ Thus, these scenes mark the intercessory service before God that open the way for divine intervention in history on behalf his people.

In this regarding, Aune recalls that the “the coals of fire from the heavenly altar symbolize the series of judgments that are about to be inflicted on the people of the earth.” Thus, “the prayers of the saints must be constructed as prayers for divine vengeance upon those who have persecuted them.”⁴⁴⁰ The altar under which their blood (souls) is depicted (Rev 6:9) creates a parallel to the altar from which the “fire” is taken off to be thrown down on

⁴³⁶ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 286.

⁴³⁷ About the heavenly sanctuary introductory scene to the heptads of visions in Revelation, see Strand, “The Eight Basic Visions,” 35-49; and Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in Literary Patterns in Revelation,” 5-7.

⁴³⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 286.

⁴³⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 494.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 494-95.

earth (8:4). Therefore, the prayers for vengeance uttered by the memory of the souls of the martyrs are attended since the intercession is placed at the altar of incense *before* God.

Based in the methodology of allusion and intertextuality, Paulien developed an interpretation for the trumpets from the perspective that they announce judgments over the enemies of God's people in Christian age. According to him, in the first trumpet the "trees" and "green grass" (8:7) are placed as symbols of Jerusalem, the first Christian enemy, which was burnt in fire in 70 CE.⁴⁴¹ Stefanovic argues that "Jesus used tree's symbolism in referring to the Jewish people as the green tree" (cf. Luke 23:28-31).⁴⁴²

The second Christian enemy in history is the Roman Empire. This entity is represented in Revelation symbolism by the "great mountain burning with fire" casted out into the sea (8:8). On the symbols of the second trumpets (mountain and sea), meanwhile, Paulien argues that there is a double object of judgment in the second trumpet. "Both the mountain and the sea are being judged. The judgment of one results in the judgment of the other."⁴⁴³ He concludes that "in the second trumpet there is an apparent distinction between the Roman Empire as a system and the many peoples and nations that make up that system."⁴⁴⁴ Both them are affected by the trumpet second judgment. Stefanovic states that the second trumpet

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 250-251, 378-380.

⁴⁴² Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 294.

⁴⁴³ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 388; cf. also 259-260. According to Paulien, this happens also in Revelation 17 and 18, "where the prostitute/city called Babylon is distinguished from the nations who support her and are enriched by her. It is the fall of Babylon that brings with it the downfall of all the other nations" (Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 388).

⁴⁴⁴ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 388.

describes the “downfall of the Roman Empire and the devastation of its economic and social order.”⁴⁴⁵

The third and fourth trumpets, with the symbols of “rivers” and “springs of waters” which become bitter and the “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” which become dark (8:10-12) are depicting the divine judgments over the Christendom that abandoned the Biblical faith.⁴⁴⁶

Stefanovic argues that the period following the fall of Roman Empire, referred to “as the Dark or Middle Ages, witnessed great spiritual decline and apostasy, when the mainstream of the church departed from the apostolic gospel and perverted the sound teaching of the Bible.”⁴⁴⁷

He also attests that the fourth trumpet might be understood as “temporal darkening of the spiritual sources of the true light, namely, the Bible gospel, under the prevailing influence of secularism.”⁴⁴⁸

In this line, Paulien concludes that “since both seals and trumpets climax with a portrayal of the consummation, they are probably both intended as an interpretation of the realities of the Christian age.”⁴⁴⁹ He adds that, “chronologically, the trumpets as a whole are a preliminary preview of the bowls, which portray the end-time wrath of God.” Thus, the trumpets reveal divine judgments over his people’s enemies throughout history, and the bowls are final judgments in the end of history over enemies as well. He adds that “the bowls as a whole are a parallel to the climax of the seven trumpets” in Revelation 11:15-18. According to

⁴⁴⁵ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 297.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 400-402; 414-416.

⁴⁴⁷ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 297. About the first four trumpets as judgments in history of Christianity, see Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 105-110.

⁴⁴⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 303.

⁴⁴⁹ Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 336.

him, there are three evident reasons for this reading. First, the plagues of the seven bowls sum up the wrath of God referred to in Revelation 11:18. The terms for God used in 11:17 are repeated in the report of the bowls in 15:3 and 16:5, 7, 14. And finally, “there is absence of expected horror when the seventh trumpet also introduces the third woe, suggesting that the third woe must be understood as the seven last plagues of the bowls.”⁴⁵⁰

In this historical line of thought, the meaning of the demonic locusts and cavalry of the fifth and sixth trumpets is to be understood in light of divine judgments upon the wicked world, after the end of the Middle and Modern Ages, in the last part of history or the climax of the end time. This very period is when the false prophet and the three demons like frogs will perform their work of deception according to the literary context of Revelation 13 and 16.

The Demonic Locusts and Cavalry

Since the trumpets are seen as divine judgments over the enemies of God’s people in history, the last of those blasts reach the end of history. For this time, Revelation has previewed a great work of deception by the part of the false prophet and the three demons like frogs. This eschatological work of deception as we have seen is part of evil effort to counterfeit the works of God performed by the three angels of Revelation 14. The following discussion about the fifth and sixth trumpets has the purpose to clarify the connection between the demons in Revelation 16 and the forces that comes out of the abyss in form of locusts and the cavalry driven by the four angels delivered at Euphrates (Rev 9).

According to John’s account, when the fifth angel sounds his trumpet, an angel fallen from heaven is given the key of the abyss which is opened to *release* a huge smoke full of

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 339-40.

“locusts” that dark “the sun and the air” (Rev 9:2). They have power as “scorpions” to harm those who don’t have the “seal of God on their forehead” (9:4). The locusts are compared to “horses prepared for battle” (9:7) and the sound of their wings is like “a sound of chariots with many horses running into battle” (9:9). They harm people by their “tails like scorpions” (9:10), and the “angel of the bottomless pit” is their leader (9:11). In addition, the sound of the sixth trumpet *releases* four angels “bound at the great river Euphrates” to kill a third part of humanity (9:14). When the “army of the horsemen” was released, John heard their number, 200 million (9:16). The horses have heads like “lions” and their mouth expel “fire, smoke and brimstone” (9:17). By their plague a third of mundanity is killed (9:18). The power of the cavalry was “in their mouth and in their tails, for the tails are like serpents” (9:19). In the time of that plague people “worship demons” (9:20). The symbols John employs to describe the vision clearly relate the plagues with demons.

Usually scholars have seen those two trumpets as connected, and the sixth trumpet depicts an intensification of the effects of the fifth one. Morris says that “the fifth trumpet had unleashed forces of destruction which were likened locusts. Those set loose by the sounding of the sixth trumpet are in the form of angels and are much more deadly.”⁴⁵¹ He highlights that “whereas the locusts tortured, the angels and their hosts killed.” He says that the sixth is to be interpreted “along the lines of the preceding vision, but everything is greatly intensified.” The locusts are followed by a huge army of horsemen on strange steeds, and “instead of torment there is death.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Morris, *Revelation*, 128.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 129.

Aune explores the parallels between the fifth and sixth trumpets description to emphasize their connection and sequence.⁴⁵³ The two reports follow a clear pattern (see the chart below).

The fact that the angel who is given the key of the abyss “had fallen” from heaven seems to indicate that he is a demon or the very Satan. Aune says that the perfect active participle πεπτωκότα (9:1) “had fallen,” modifies ἀστέρα, “star.” Thus, John means that he “saw the star *after* he had fallen.” Aune argues that “in Jewish literature, stars can represent angelic beings” (cf. Judg 5:20; Job 38:7; Dan 8:10).⁴⁵⁴ Beale agree that “the nuance of the perfect tense πεπτωκότα is that John did not see the star fall but saw it after it had fallen and identifies is as such.”⁴⁵⁵

Fifth Trumpet (Rev 9:1-12)	Sixth Trumpet (Rev 9:13-21)
1. Nature of the plague (v. 1-6)	1. Nature of the plague (v. 13-16)
a. Abyss opened (v. 2)	a. Four angels released (v. 14-15a)
b. Purpose of the plague (v. 4-5)	b. Purpose of the plague (v. 15b-16)
2. Description of the locust army (v. 7-10)	2. Description of cavalry of 200 million (v. 17)
a. Lethal nature of their tails (v. 10)	a. Lethal nature of their mouths and tails (v. 19).

Meanwhile, Aune says that “the fallen star should be understood as an angelic messenger” (cf. 20:1) and should not be identified with “the angel of the abyss named Abaddon or Appolion” in 9:11 or “Satan” in 12:9. He argues that “both Revelation 9:1-2 and

⁴⁵³ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 497.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 525.

⁴⁵⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 491.

Sibylline Oracles 5.158-61 the star is a messenger of God sent to earth.”⁴⁵⁶ And he adds that in Revelation 9:1, “a star descends from *heaven* to *earth* and is given a key to the *abyss*,” while in Revelation 20:1 “an angel descends from *heaven* (to *earth* is implied) with the key to the *abyss*.” And thus, those messengers could be both heavenly beings.⁴⁵⁷

However, in Revelation 9:1 the angel is *releasing* the demons, and in Revelation 20:1, the heavenly angel is *arresting* the demon. The two passages are describing opposite events by the part of opposite beings. In Revelation 9:11, John talks about the “angel of the abyss” (τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου), with a definitive article implying that this is an already introduced angel in the context. Stefanovic says that maybe he is the same “fallen star” in the third trumpet in 8:10.⁴⁵⁸ Moreover, in Revelation, the dragon is “cast down” from heaven and brings with him a third of the “stars” (12:9, 10, 3). The language employed in Revelation 9 seems to indicate the very Satan after his fall. Stefanovic states that “this fallen star represents Satan and his falling from heaven to earth, and identified as the angel of the abyss.”⁴⁵⁹

In this line, Beale recalls that even Jesus uses virtually the identical expression to describe Satan’s judgment in Luke 10:18: “I was seeing Satan as a star falling from heaven.” In Luke 10:17-20 Jesus identifies Satan “as head over demons and, with them, in the process of being subjugated to him and his disciples.” He concludes that the expression in Revelation

⁴⁵⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 525.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁴⁵⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 308.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

9:1 may be another way of saying that Satan “was cast to the earth, and his angels with him were cast” (cf. 12:9, 3).⁴⁶⁰

In another way, Aune highlights that “the two definite articles in the phrase ‘*the* shaft of *the* abyss’ indicate that the notion of a shaft to the abyss, as well as the concept of abyss itself, was well known to the readers.”⁴⁶¹ Koester adds that “in Revelation the abyss is the demonic realm.” He says that first, the abyss is to be differentiated from the area “under the earth,” which is “home to creatures from the natural world” (cf. 5:13). Second, he states, that the abyss is different from Hades, “where the dead are kept until the last judgment” (cf. 1:18; 20:13). And finally, both the abyss and Hades are different from the “lake of fire,” which is the place of final punishment.⁴⁶²

Therefore, the concept of abyss in Revelation 9 is clearly connected to Satan and demons. This is very important in considering the kind of plague that the fifth and sixth trumpets are revealing. Beale argues that the conclusion about the evil nature of the being in Revelation 9:1 is supported by the use of the word *abyssos* (“abism, pit”) in the LXX. In Job, the “abyss” (cf. 41:23-24) is the “abode of the cosmic sea dragon” (40:17; 40:25; 4:10). He says that “this abode became symbolic for the forces of evil” (cf. Psa. 76[77]:16). Moreover, he adds that Isaiah 24:21-22 says God will “punish angels and evil kings,” and “they will be gathered together as prisoners in the pit, and will be confined in prison, and after many days will be punished.” In Jewish thought, “fallen angels were said to be imprisoned in the pit to

⁴⁶⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 492.

⁴⁶¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 525.

⁴⁶² Koester, *Revelation*, 456.

await final judgment.”⁴⁶³ Thus, the abyss became also “the place where the judgment was to be endured and prison of demons, where they are tormented” (cf. Luke 8:31; 1 Eno 21:7-10), as John depicts in Revelation 9:1-3. Besides, the abyss is also where the beast and the dragon are to be confined (cf. Rev 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3). “All of these associations of the abyss are included in the word used in 9:1, but uppermost in mind is the idea of a place of punishment where evil spirits are confined under God’s sovereignty.”⁴⁶⁴ Koester adds that the terrifying beings that emerge from the abyss include the locustlike creatures that torment people (9:3-10) and the beast that persecutes the saints (11:7; 17:8). “Eventually, Satan himself is confined to the abyss for a thousand years before being released and thrown into the lake of fire” (cf. 20:1-3).⁴⁶⁵

Meanwhile, Aune defends that, in Revelation 9:1-11, “the abyss is the dwelling place of locust-demons who can be released only when the shaft (φρέαρ) to the abyss is opened by someone entrusted with the key.”⁴⁶⁶ He adds that the shaft to the underground, in Revelation 9:1, is specifically “the region where demons dwell and the place from which the beast ascends” (cf. 11:7; 17:8), and it is “presented as if it were blocked by a door to which God alone holds the key.”⁴⁶⁷ What comes out from there are no doubt demonic beings. “These

⁴⁶³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 493. Cf. 1 Eno 10:4-14; 18:11-16; 19:1; 21:7; 54:1-6; 83:1-3; 90:23-26; Jub 5:6-14; 2 Pet 2:4; cf. 4 Ezra 7:36; Prayer of Manasseh 3. Stefanovic adds that “the sea is obviously related to the abyss (bottomless pit), the abode of Satan and his demons (cf. Rev 13:1; 17:8)” (Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 21).

⁴⁶⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 493.

⁴⁶⁵ Koester, *Revelation*, 456.

⁴⁶⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 526.

⁴⁶⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 256-257.

[locusts] are demons in the guise of locusts, for their king is Abaddon, the angel of the abyss.”⁴⁶⁸

The name of the angel who controls the realm of the demons is “Abbadon” (Ἀβαδδών, a transliteration of Hebrew *abbadon*) which means “destruction,” and “Apollyon” (Ἀπολλύων), the Greek term for “destroyer.” In the Old Testament, Beale recalls that “Destruction” is sometimes related to Sheol or “death,” the “realm of the dead” (cf. Job 26:6; 28:22; Ps 88:11; Prov 15:11; 27:20).⁴⁶⁹ Koester says that “Death and Abaddon were occasionally personified” to emphasize their power (cf. Job 28:22; Rev 6:8),⁴⁷⁰ as occurs in Revelation 9:11. The parallel with the sixth trumpet is that, while the locusts have the angel-king Abbadon, the cavalry have the four angels as their leaders. From one angel-leader to four angels, John wants to give the idea of intensification. In this line, both the angel who is given the key and those four angels released at Euphrates are demon-leaders. The four angels “direct the great host in order to bring about the intended result,”⁴⁷¹ as the angel of the abyss drives the locust-demons to their evil work.

In discussing the identity of the angel of abyss, Hoffmann says that the only other angel referred to by name is “Michael” in Revelation 12:7. “Angels are rarely named in the Apocalypse, and it is unclear if John simply has no interest in designating angels with names,

⁴⁶⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 527.

⁴⁶⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 502. Aune considers that “terms such as στρατήγος, ‘commander,’ ὀδηγός, ‘leader,’ or ἄρχων, ‘ruler, prince,’ would appear a more appropriate designation for a demonic leader. Satan is often called the ‘prince’ or ‘ruler’ (ἄρχων) of demons (Matt 9:24; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15; *Asc. Isa.* 2:4), though ἄρχων is sometimes used to mean ‘king’ (Rev 1:5)” (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 535).

⁴⁷⁰ Koester, *Revelation*, 461.

⁴⁷¹ Morris, *Revelation*, 131.

or if he intends by this omission to place a special emphasis on those he does name.”⁴⁷² The expression “the angel of the bottomless” (Rev 9:11) is a designation to the commander of kingdom of the dead, usually personified by death, destruction, hell, and Sheol (as in Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Ps 88:12; Prov 15:11; 27:20). Hoffmann also considers that the Hebrew expression *abaddon* is often translated as the Greek ἀπόλεια (Prov 15:11; Ps 87:12; Job 28:22) which “is also reflected in the Greek name *Apollion* this angel receives in the Apocalypse.”⁴⁷³

That the demons are in prison and can do some things only when permitted by God is indicated by the phrase “the hour and the day and the month and the year.” Aune says that this phrase “emphasizes the role God has predetermined for these beings in the eschatological drama.”⁴⁷⁴ This notion is according to Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10, when he says that God sends the “strong delusion” just before his coming. Paul says that after the Parousia (παρουσία) of the lawless, God will consume him by the “breath of his mouth” at his own Parousia (παρουσία; 2 Thess 2:8-9). The word Parousia highlights the attempt of the demons to imitate Jesus’ presence at the eschatological drama. It also suggests the link between the Pauline lawless and the false prophet and the demons who will be killed by Jesus who has the sword in his mouth, at the Parousia (Rev 19:20).

The mention of river Euphrates in Revelation 9:14 also highlights the notion of divine permission in relation to the work of those demons. Beale says that the parallel between

⁴⁷² Matthias Reinhard Hoffman, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship Between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 125.

⁴⁷³ Hoffmann, 126.

⁴⁷⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 537.

Revelation 7:1 and 9:14 allow to identify “the four winds of the earth” held back in 7:1 with the “four angels bound at the Euphrates.”⁴⁷⁵ The definite article employed in Revelation 9:14 (τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους) suggests that a specific group of angels is in view, and it should be noticed that these four angels at the Euphrates is not attested elsewhere. Moreover, the fact that “they have been *bound* shows that they are not good angels going forth voluntarily to do God’s will.” Morris says that “they are evil beings who have been restrained until now. This ties in with the general pattern that this section of the book deals with the demonic.”⁴⁷⁶ The two deliverance of the angels hold in confinement indicate that they may be the same group and have a work detained by God.⁴⁷⁷ In Revelation 7, they are bound until the servants of God are sealed “on their forehead” (7:3, ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων). In Revelation 9:14, the locusts which are the forerunners of the cavalry led by the four Euphrates’ angels are to harm only those who don’t have the seal of God “on their forehead” (9:4, ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων). Beale adds that the locusts harm only unbelievers, “those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads,” and those are the same group who have the “mark of the beast on the forehead” (13:16-17).⁴⁷⁸

In this line, Yattes also defends the equivalence between the locusts in Revelation 9 and the demons in Revelation 16. He says that “the frogs of the sixth bowl of God’s wrath are

⁴⁷⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 507.

⁴⁷⁶ Morris, *Revelation*, 130.

⁴⁷⁷ Koester understands differently. He says that “the angels set loose here do not appear elsewhere in Revelation. The four angels in 7:1 stood at the four corners of the earth and held back destructive winds, while here the four angels are at the Euphrates and are themselves held back from destroying. The angels are bound, as Satan later will be (20:2; cf. Mark 3:27), suggesting that they are demonic beings like those released from the abyss in the previous vision. Some evil angels were said to be confined in a dark netherworld until the judgment (Judg 6; 2 Pet 2:4), but those in Revelation are bound on earth and released to wreak destruction” (Koester, *Revelation*, 466). One needs to consider that the Euphrates in Revelation 16 stands for the whole world.

⁴⁷⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 495.

demonic spirits, performing signs.” In the same way, “the locusts of the fifth trumpets were not really locusts, but demonic beings, the entities in this bowl are frog-like demons.”

Moreover, he states that “they work signs in support of the evil trinity just as the false prophet did miracles in support of the beast (13:13-14) and the magicians in Egypt worked wonders for Pharaoh” (cf. Exo. 7:22; see also Matt. 24:24).⁴⁷⁹

Therefore, the manifestation of the demons depicted in the fifth and sixth trumpets in Revelation 9:1-21, and the false prophet in 13:13-14, and the three demons in 16:13-14 has the clear purpose to deceive people in the end time. The concept of deception so emphasized by Paul and John the seer calls attention to the moment when this work of false miracles and signs is to be placed in motion.

This eschatological event must be understood as an evil work that deceives people when they are hearing the voice of God through the three angels of Revelation 14. As the world is been faced by the last appeal to worship the true God, the demons are trying to deviate its attention by performing signs and wonders to manipulate the people through their senses.

Since the last seven bowls, according to Paulien, are the climax of the seven trumpets,⁴⁸⁰ the work of the demons depicted by the fifth and sixth trumpets and in Revelation 16 must take place before the starting of the bowls. In this context, before the bowls, people

⁴⁷⁹ Yattes, *Revelation*, 296.

⁴⁸⁰ Paulien says that “the bowls as a whole are a parallel to the climax of the seven trumpets” in Revelation 11:15-18. He explores three reasons for this view. The plagues of the seven bowls sum up the wrath of God referred to in Revelation 11:18. The terms for God used in 11:17 are repeated in bowls account in 15:3 and 16:5, 7, 14. And finally, there is an absence of “expected horror when the seventh trumpet also introduces the third woe, suggesting that the third woe must be understood as the seven last plagues of the bowls” (Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 339-40).

may decide to believe in God or in the demons. After the finish of intercession at the heavenly temple (Rev 15:8), people have no more decision to take because only will remain to them the wrath of God through the bowls (16:1). Thus, an effort to deceive makes sense only when people can decide to believe in it.

The Demonic Cavalry in Armageddon

The concept of battle is emphasized in Revelation 9 by the use of the word “horse” (Greek ἵπποις). In the fifth trumpet, John says that “the shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle” (9:7), and that the “sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle.” In the sixth trumpet he says that he “saw horses” and “the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions” (9:17), and “the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads” (9:19, NAS). Besides to connect the two trumpets, the imagery of horses and chariots emphasizes the concept of battle in these two trumpets. This concept of battle clearly links those two trumpets account to Armageddon’s report.

This connection is very important in understanding these trumpets in relation to the battle of Armageddon. Aune says that the phrase “the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle” has the implicit comparison of the “large cavalry” with the “locust plague.”⁴⁸¹ Koester also states that the “comparison of the locusts and horses emphasizes their military aspect” (cf. Isa 31:1; Hag 2:22). He recalls that, in Joel 2:4-5, which “informs John’s

⁴⁸¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 531.

imagery,” the locusts “have the appearance of horses, and like war-horses they charge.”

Moreover, they are like “a powerful army drawn up for battle.”⁴⁸²

Meanwhile, in Revelation 19, another commander drives another cavalry into battle. Johns depicts Christ on a “white horse,” as the “Word of God,” followed by “armies” mounted in “white horses” (Rev 19:13-14). Those two cavalries will fight the battle of Armageddon. The divine cavalry comes from “heaven” (19:14) and the demonic cavalry comes from the “abyss” (9:1-2). Those places reveal their contrary nature and impulses.

The description of both the locusts and the demonic cavalry is very detailed and impressive. Aune considers the descriptions of the locust as a “work of art.” He defends that the reason for the detailed description of demons in the form of locusts “is to underline their evil origin.” Besides, Aune considers that John follows a particular pattern in this description: (1) overall appearance (like warhorses), (2) heads (wearing crowns), (3) faces (human), (4) hair (like woman), (5) teeth (like lions), (6) scales (like iron breastplates), (7) sound winds (like horses and chariots rushing to battle), and (8) tails (like scorpions).⁴⁸³ He adds that the author began by describing the demonic beings that emerge from the shaft of the abyss as “locusts” (9:3). However, in v. 7-9 they are described first in theriomorphic terms (they look like warhorses, v. 7a). Then they are described in anthropomorphic terms (they wear something like gold wreaths on their heads, v. 7b, their faces look human, v. 7b; and they have disheveled hair, v. 8a). Finally, the author resorts again to theriomorphic imagery in that they are described as having teeth like lions (v. 8).⁴⁸⁴ John makes a chiasm in his description of the

⁴⁸² Koester, *Revelation*, 459.

⁴⁸³ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 496.

⁴⁸⁴ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 532.

locusts highlighting their human resemblance at the center, maybe to point their demonic and intelligent nature above their animal features. This is very important in considering the locusts and the horses as symbols of spiritualism or religious deception as a curse allowed by God over the wicked in the last days. Mounce says that the human faces show that these demonic locusts represent rational beings, or “intelligent cunning and cruelty of demonic beings.” He adds that “man and beast are combined in a figure both unnatural and diabolical.”⁴⁸⁵

In this context, Aune considers that the number of the cavalry as of “two hundred million” is a way of indicating that they are “a demonic rather than a human army.”⁴⁸⁶ He adds that “the colors of the breastplates of the cavalry soldiers (red, blue, and yellow) are correlated with the fire, smoke, and sulfur that proceed from their mouths.”⁴⁸⁷ With these details John emphasizes their destructive power. The notion of judgment on the wicked world is highlighted by the mention of scorpions. “Scorpions are one of nine instruments of destruction that God created to punish the wicked,” and they are a “metaphor for punishment” (cf. 1 Kgs 12:11, 14; 2 Chr 10:11, 14).⁴⁸⁸ The fact that the locusts have power like scorpions strengthen their connection to demons, since scorpions are “biblical symbol of demons” (cf. Luke 10:17-20).⁴⁸⁹

In addition, Beale highlights that, by comparing the horses with serpents in Revelation 9:19, John seems “to emphasize the lethal power of the horses.” He adds that, in Numbers

⁴⁸⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 196.

⁴⁸⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 539.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 531.

⁴⁸⁹ Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 112.

21:6, “serpents” by the poison in their mouth punished sinful Israel with physical death in the wilderness (cf. Deut 32:24; Jer 8:17). “The metaphor of the serpent enforces further the connotation of the mouth as that which harms by means of deceptive falsehood.” John’s tacit intention is “to identify the beastly horses with Satan himself, who is known in the Apocalypse as ‘the Serpent’.”⁴⁹⁰

In this manner, the concept of spiritual battle is very emphasized in Revelation 9. The locusts and the horses are symbols to depict the demons of spiritualism as the opponents of God’s people in the time of the end. They have the goal to deceive by doing signs and wonders. This work is not a calm and pacific event, but a very event of war and confrontation.

The spiritual nature of the battle depicted in the fifth and sixth trumpets with the engagement of demons is very important to clarify the nature of Armageddon as a spiritual war, not a political and military one. Both the false prophet and three demons like frogs by performing signs to deceive the kings and the inhabitants of the world are also engaged in a spiritual battle. The divine and heavenly cavalry in Revelation 19:13-14 led by the “Word of God” is also engaged in a spiritual battle. In this line of thought, Armageddon is clearly the last battle to manifest before the whole world who is the true God worthy to be worshiped.

Imitation and Parody

By different ways John emphasizes the element of parody and imitation in the accounts of the last battle. The false prophet makes signs “before the beast” (Rev 13:12; 19:20) as if they were done “before God.” The three demons like frogs make signs as the Egyptian magicians to imitate the work of God by his servants (16:14). Those demons are a trio of

⁴⁹⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 514.

fallen angels to counterfeit the work of the three heavenly angels (Rev 14:6-11). The armies of the locusts and the cavalry (Rev 9) are a counterpart of the heavenly armies following Christ (Rev 19:13-14). Thus, evil imitation and parody is clearly intended to be a work of deception in the last time.

Paulien argues that there are references to Satan's counterfeit in a number of contexts besides Revelation 13. He considers that the counterpart of Revelation 10:7 and 11:11-13 is the "fearful picture of the fifth trumpet" (cf. Rev 9:13-21). Besides, the description of the "grotesque army of the sixth trumpet is just as military as the battle of Armageddon." The army of 200 million is the "spiritual counterpart of the 144,000" (cf. Rev 9:13-16 with 7:1-4). He adds that this army operates "at the same point in history, attempting to draw people away from the true gospel."⁴⁹¹ Thus, the work of the demons (Rev 9; 16) take place in the same time of the work of the three angels (Rev 14), and present itself as a work of imitation and parody.

The power of the demonic cavalry in the sixth trumpet is in their "mouth" and "tails." John refers three times to "mouth" in this report (Greek στόμα; Rev 9:17, 18, 19). Twenty-two times he uses this word in the whole book, ten of them in relation to heavenly beings and twelve to evil beings. By his turn, Osborne highlights that the mention of the power of the horses in their mouth emphasizes their attempt of "parody or imitation of Christ, namely of the sword that proceeds from his mouth in judgment" (cf. Rev 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21). Thus, the demonic horses (Rev 9:17-19) copy the "method of judgment exercised by Christ."⁴⁹²

In Revelation 16:13, John uses the word "mouth" three times, to emphasize the "mouth" of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet as the *origin* of the demons like frogs.

⁴⁹¹ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 160-161.

⁴⁹² Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, 383.

Thomas says that for the first readers of Revelation the emphasis “upon what comes from the mouths of this triumvirate of evil, mentioned here together for the first time in the book, would not doubt remind ... of the things that have been said to come from their mouth previously.” Among those things, one mentions “the river which came from the mouth of the ancient serpent to drown the rest of the seed of the woman clothed with the sun” (cf. 12:15) and the “great and blasphemous things that come from the mouth of the beast” (cf. 13:5-6).⁴⁹³ He adds that, at the same time, “these would likely be thought of in contrast to the double-edged sword that comes from the mouth of Jesus” (cf. 1:16; 2:16).

The “mouth” of the mimic evil trio also reminds of the “fire and smoke” that come from the mouth of the horses of the sixth trumpet (9:17-19), and the “fire that comes from the mouth of the two witness” (11:5). Thomas highlights that, however, perhaps most poignantly the first readers of Revelation would be reminded of the fact that “in the mouths of the 144,000 were found no lies” (cf. 14:5).⁴⁹⁴ Besides that, as the divine trinity is very united, the evil one is as well. Thomas highlights also that “the unity of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet is underscored by the fact that the demon spirits come from each of their mouths performing miraculous signs” (cf. 16:13).⁴⁹⁵ Evidently, the emphasize in the “mouth” by the part of both groups highlights the notion of Armageddon as war disputed through the words, discourse, preaching, and religious debate.

In addition, Paulien recalls that, in Mount Carmel, the fact that the prophets of Baal “could not bring fire down from heaven” made clear that they were not worshipping the true

⁴⁹³ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 480-481.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 481.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

God. By the other hand, the Israelites believed the work of Elijah before the clear manifestation of the power of God by sending fire from heaven. When the fire came down from the Lord on the altar at the mountain, “all the people *saw* it,” and “they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!’” (1 Kings 18:39, italics mine).

Thus, the *fire from heaven* made the Israelites recognize the work of God before their very “eyes.” Paulien highlights that this remind “one of the key elements of final events” in the book of Revelation. He says that the land beast performs great signs, “even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people.”⁴⁹⁶ Thus, the experience of Mount Carmel will be repeated at the end in support of the counterfeit trinity. “In that occasion all the evidence of your *eyes* and your *ears* will tell you that you’ve been wrong to follow the Bible.”⁴⁹⁷

In this line, Revelation depicts the final crisis by emphasizing that the work of deception is really designed to make what the servants of God did in the past. With this falsification the evil messengers want to prove that they have the very power of God. By doing such a signs to deceive people, the false prophet and the demons will imitate the works of God through Moses and Elijah, the two witness, the apostles, and the very Jesus. The goal of this work of falsification is to persuade people to worship the dragon, the beast, and the image of the beast (Rev 13:4, 12, 15; 14:9, 11) instead the God who make the heaven and earth (Rev 14:7).

⁴⁹⁶ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 57.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

However, the locusts can harm only those who don't have the "seal of the living God" (Rev 9:4; cf. 7:2). This means that the work of the true God will also be performed by the divine army of God, the 144,000. They will proclaim and testify about the "everlasting gospel" before the whole world to call people to worship the only God creator and redeemer (Rev 14:6-11). In this context, people can be safe as they believe and accept the word of God manifested by his servants.

Since the seal consists of the name of God and the Lamb (Rev 14:1), Koester recalls that "it identifies those who belong to God and protects them from divine wrath" (cf. 7:3).⁴⁹⁸ Aune highlights that Revelation 7:3 has a *positive* formulation by stating that "the harming of earth, the sea, and trees is delayed until the sealing of the servants of God is completed." Meanwhile, Revelation 9:4 has a *negative* formulation by stating that "only those people who don't have the seal of God on their forehead are to be harmed."⁴⁹⁹

Therefore, there is a parallel by contrast between the seven seals and the seven trumpets regarding those sealed with the seal of God. While in Revelation 7:3 the angels empowered to harm the earth and the sea are commanded to wait until the servants of God are sealed, in 9:4 those who don't have the seal of God are to be harmed by the locust. So, the work of the locusts follows the process of sealing of the servants of God.

The sealing of God's faithful in Revelation has a clear intertextuality with Ezekiel. Aune highlights that the mention of the "seal of God" in Revelation 9:4 refers the reader back to Revelation 7:2-8 and "makes it explicit that the purpose of the sealing is that of protection."

⁴⁹⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 458.

⁴⁹⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 529.

Besides, this “motif of protection is central in the sealing episodes in Ezekiel 9:3-8.”⁵⁰⁰ Before the coming of the Chaldeans over Jerusalem, the faithful Jews were sealed and protected by God (Ezek 4:12, 13; 9:4; 14:21; 22:15-22). In these contexts, the seal or mark is a sign of protection, like the blood on the doorpost in the tenth plague in Egypt. Only those who have the seal on their forehead, as a sign of belonging to God, may be protected and saved. John depicts the 144,000 with the “seal of God,” or his name, on their “forehead” with the Lamb on the Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-5). They will survive in safe through the final crisis that will involve the whole earth.

What is very striking about the mention of the seal of God in the context of the trumpets in Revelation is that, in Ezekiel, the transgression of the Sabbath is one of the most emphasized causes of the captivity (cf. Ezek 20:13, 16, 21, 24; 22:8, 26; 23:38). Therefore, this was also the cause of death of those who did not have the “mark” on their “forehead” (Ezek 9:4). God declared that the Israelites had “polluted” his sanctuary and “desecrated” his Sabbaths (Ezek 23:37, 38; cf. Nee. 13:15-20). Thus, in the final crisis of Armageddon, the fourth commandment assumes a significant place as the Adventist pioneers already believed in the 19th century. “The call of the first angel draws attention to the Creator. Keeping the Sabbath is evidence of one’s acceptance of this call.”⁵⁰¹ LaRondelle says that “the sanctuary and the Sabbath were Israel’s basic pillars of worshiping God as creator and redeemer.”⁵⁰² This motif of creation and redemption is at the center of worship debate in Revelation.

⁵⁰⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 530.

⁵⁰¹ Johnsson, 38.

⁵⁰² LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 153.

CHAPTER 8

THE CLIMAX OF ARMAGEDDON

The final battle between Christ and Satan, named Armageddon in Revelation, is referred to in many passages from chapter 12 through 19. John says that the dragon pursues the “remnant of the woman” those who “keep the commandments of God” (Rev 12:17). The “image of the beast” places upon people the mark of the beast, imposes an economic boycott, and kills those who don’t have the “mark” (13:15-17). The three heavenly angels proclaim the “everlasting gospel” to the world and call the earth to worship the only God creator (14:6-11). The beast and the kings of the earth “make war” against the Lamb and his faithful but they are overcome (17:14). The King of kings on the white horse with his armies faces the beast, false prophet, and the kings of the earth with their armies and defeat them completely (19:11-21). The same confrontation is referred to in the fifth and sixth trumpets with the imagery of demonic locusts and cavalry ready for battle (Rev 9).

All those visions have been understood in a way or another as a battle before the second coming of Christ. However, the vision of the rider on a white horse in Revelation 19:11-21 is generally considered as depicting Jesus in the very second coming *when* he would finally defeat his enemies.⁵⁰³ That would be the last battle, the actual Armageddon. This

⁵⁰³ LaRondelle seems to see in this way. He says that “as a commander of the angelic legions of heaven, Christ will descend from the eastern skies to wage war against the united ‘kings of the earth’ and their armies.” Also, that the “kings of the east” thus appear in opposition to the “kings of the

happens usually for a sequential reading from Revelation 16 through 19 without considering the cyclical nature of John's prophetic account. However, since Armageddon is considered a spiritual and religious battle, for the "mind of the people," the last battle about who is the true God worthy of worship, a battle which recalls the Mount Carmel, a battle between the armies of demons and the armies of Jesus, it is necessary more clarification about *when* and *how* this battle is overcome by Christ and his armies according to Revelation 19.

The present chapter intends to discuss the issue by considering the vision of Revelation 19:11-21 not as the second coming, but as the confrontation of the very Armageddon in its final phase. Armageddon in this line is understood as a really spiritual war, defeated by spiritual e religious armies. In this battle the most important weapon is that which comes from the "mouth" of the warriors in both sides of the front.

That the vision of the rider in Revelation 19 needs to be seen as symbolic is clear by the fact that Jesus mounts a "horse" and his armies as well. Nobody would defend that he will come from heaven at the Parousia on a horse neither his angels.⁵⁰⁴ Horses are biblical language and symbols of battle and confrontation.⁵⁰⁵ Koester agrees that "horse and cavalry

earth," a cosmic contrast between heaven and earth at the Parousia (LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 119).

⁵⁰⁴ Aune says that "the appearance of the rider on the white horse accompanied by an angelic cavalry is generally, and probably correctly, understood as a dramatization of the Parousia of Jesus." According to him, "in no other early Christian eschatological scenario that includes the Parousia, however, Jesus is depicted as mounted on a white horse, making it likely that this distinctive conception of the Parousia is adapted from elsewhere. In the Greco-Roman world, the image of the celestial rider was widely understood as a savior who could deliver people from various kinds of trouble" (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1053).

⁵⁰⁵ Krodel says that "the horse is an animal of war and white is the heavenly eschatological color" (cf. 3:4-5; 6:11) (Krodel, *Revelation*, 321).

riders connote warfare” (cf. Isa 31:1; Jer 8:6; Acts 23:23). Because that, “horses imagery appears in Revelation’s battle scenes” (cf. Rev 9:7-19; 14:20; 19:11-21).⁵⁰⁶

The White Horseman

John uses the Greek word ἵππος (“horses”) five times in Revelation 19 (vv. 11, 14, 18, 19, 21). He talks about the Word of God mounted on a horse, his armies, and the evil armies as well. This a clear picture of war and confrontation and retakes the vision of the fifth and sixth trumpets. This imagery of horses and riders has a clear intertextuality with the description of Ezekiel about war of “Gog,” of the land of “Magog,” against “Israel.” The prophet mentions “horses” and their riders three times (38:4, 15; 39:20). In this battle, all the horses and their riders would be killed by the God of Israel and their “flesh” would feed the birds of the air (39:17-20).

This imagery is also allusive to the Egyptian’s defeat at the exodus narrative, when the horses of the Pharaoh and his armies were killed by the mighty hand of God under the waters of the Red Sea (Exod 15:1, 19, 21). Thus, as John uses Old Testament historical accounts in a symbolic way, the use of horses in Revelation 19 is to be interpreted as a symbolic language to talk about a spiritual war of Armageddon that has a literary background in the Old Testament. The vision of the rider on a white horse in Revelation 19 recalls the “white horse” of the first seal (Rev 6:2)

The identity of the first white horse in Revelation 6:2 is very debated for the scholars who are divided between those who see it as a curse and others who see it as the advance of the gospel or even the very Jesus after Pentecost.

⁵⁰⁶ Koester, *Revelation*, 393.

In defense of this white rider as a curse, Beale argues that the most obvious imagery background for Revelation 6:2-8 is Zechariah 6:1-8 (cf. also Zech. 1:8-15). He says that “there four groups of horses of different colors are commissioned by God to patrol the earth and to *punish* those nations that they see oppressing God’s people” (cf. Zech 6:5-8, italics mine).⁵⁰⁷ Thus, Beale concludes that in Zechariah 1:8-15 and in Revelation 6:2-8 the horses are “identified together as being the same in nature, and this must be also the case in Revelation 6:1-8.”⁵⁰⁸ Thus, he defends that the white horse represents “a satanic force attempting to defeat and oppress believers spiritually through deception, persecution, or both.”⁵⁰⁹ In this line, Krodel argues that, “since Christ opens all seven seals, he can hardly be the first rider, nor would be subject to the command of the four heavenly pets.”⁵¹⁰ By his turn, Swete also insists that “all the seals are terrible disasters; the first one is no exception.” Besides, the Lord Jesus does appear in a white horse in Revelation 19:11, “but the two riders have nothing in common beyond the white horse.”⁵¹¹ In Revelation 6:2, the rider is “given” (Greek ἐδόθη) a crown. Hoffman argues that “Christ is never attributed with divine power in such a passive way, he actively takes the scroll from God” (cf. Rev 5:7). He recalls that the passive ἐδόθη is

⁵⁰⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 372.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁵¹⁰ Krodel, *Revelation*, 173.

⁵¹¹ Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: MI: Kregel, 1977), 86.

“never used for portraying Christ,” and “it seems that John carefully avoided the application of this term for Christ.”⁵¹²

In the other side, Aune calls attention to the fact that the Greek phrase καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος λευκὸς καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτόν, literary, “and behold, a white horse and the one seated on it,” of Revelation 6:2 is repeated verbatim in 19:11. To him, this fact suggests “some kind of literary correlation between the two passages, perhaps even the identity of the two cavaliers.”⁵¹³ Thomas understands that the appearance of the “white horse” in Revelation 19:11 “could not but cause the hearers to question whether or not these two white horses are one and the same.”⁵¹⁴ Yattes defends that in Revelation the “color *white* is always a symbol of Christ or spiritual victory and never the victory of the forces of evil” (cf. 1:4; 2:7; 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 14:14; 19:11, 14; 20:11). Indeed, “this rider is not said to cause persecution as the others do.”⁵¹⁵ Kovacs and Rowland recall that Victorinus began “a long tradition of interpretation when he identifies the rider on the white horse as Christ, or the Christian gospel” (suggested by the rider of 19:11). In Victorinus view, “After our Lord ascended into heaven, he opened all things and sent his Holy Spirit, whose words, like seals, reached the human heart through preachers and overcame unbelief. ... The white horse is the word of preaching sent to the world with the Holy Spirit.”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Matthias Reinhard Hoffman, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship Between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 127.

⁵¹³ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 393.

⁵¹⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 574.

⁵¹⁵ Yattes, *Revelation*, 124.

⁵¹⁶ Judith Kovacs; Christopher Rowland. *Revelation: Blackwell Bible Commentary* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 78-79.

Besides, Douglas Keely argues that this white horseman “is none other than the victorious Christ, whose crown shows that he was vindicated after his finished work, by his coronation [Rev 5] in glory above.” He argues that the bow he carries is “the instrument of God’s judgment against his own enemies.” And he adds that Psalm 45:3-5 “prophetically sets forth what Christ would do on the white horse.”⁵¹⁷ Koester also argues that, since “the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19:11 is clearly Christ, so one might assume that the figure in 6:2 is also Christ.” Therefore, “if the first horseman conquers, so does Christ” (cf. 3:21; 5:5-6; 17:14). Besides, the white color “is associated with God, Christ, and the faithful.”⁵¹⁸ Lenski adds that the other three horsemen (red, black, and yellow) “are personifications” of persecution, famine, and death. According to him, since the horses are in sequence and are placed together, “it is, therefore, fair to conclude that the first also is” a personification. In this case, the white horseman is not Christ in person, but he would be also the personification of “Christ and Christianity.”⁵¹⁹ This personification of the gospel or the Word of God is found also in the fourth gospel. Jesus says, “the words that I have spoken *will judge* him [the

⁵¹⁷ Douglas F. Kelly, *Revelation: A Mentor Expository Commentary* (Charlotte, NC: Mentor, 2012), 115.

⁵¹⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 394. Although his contrary understandings, Beale punctuates that the evidences for considering the white horse as Christ or the forces of the gospel can be added by these points: (1) John may be doing an allusion to Psalm 45:3-5 that depicts the rider as an Israelite king who defeat his enemies with arrows as he “rides on victoriously” (Psa 45:6, which echoes in Hebrews 1:8 as a messianic prophecy. (2) Part of the Synoptic discourse tradition (Mark 13:10) places the universal preaching of the gospel before the beginning of some of the messianic woes and before the Son of man’s coming in judgment. And (3) the first horseman is different from the others in a positive sense because there is no clear woe linked with him (cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 375).

⁵¹⁹ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 221.

unbeliever] in the last days” (John 12:48, italics mine). In this line, the white horseman personifies the Word of God that “rides forth into all the world.”⁵²⁰

In this discussion, one needs to recall that the list of the four curses (sword, famine, pestilence, and beasts) in Ezekiel 14:21 is the same one in Leviticus 26 (in this order, see v. 7, 25; 20; 25; 22) and in Deuteronomy 28 (see v. 22; 48; 21; 26, 36). This very list repeated in this order in Revelation 6:8 leaves the first rider out of the group who represents curses. Since Revelation 6:4 the sword is given to the *second* horseman, and famine, pestilence and beasts follow until the *fourth*, it is suggested that the first horse must be distinguished from the others three. Besides, the purpose of the curse in Leviticus and Ezekiel was not to destroy the Israelites, but to restore them to the covenant again. In this line, Revelation is taken even these curses of the red, black, and yellow horses as a providence of the exalted Jesus to restore the unfaithful Christianity to the covenant like the Israelites in the Old Testament. Besides that, since in Revelation 5 Christ is on the throne, he is guiding the events. The first event to place the plan of salvation in process is the preaching of the gospel from Pentecost. There is no sense in a persecution by “sword” without the preaching of the gospel.

Meanwhile, Phillips argues that John’s imagery allusion to Zechariah’s horsemen suggests that those three horses in Revelation (red, black, and yellow) “go forth to inflict punishment on a world in rebellion against God.” However, the church is in the world and it is thus “equally subject to these woes.”⁵²¹ But he insists that “the judgments depicted in this vision also follow the pattern laid down in Ezekiel 14:12-23, the point of which was not only

⁵²⁰ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 222.

⁵²¹ Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 208.

to punish idolaters but also to purify the faith of God's people."⁵²² Thus, even the curses has a salvific purpose, much more the preaching of the gospel depicted by the white horse.

Although that, one should remember that horses are symbols of battle. The two cavalries (Rev 9:16; 19:14) already mentioned point to the climax of battle of Armageddon. Aune says that "the first cavalier primarily represents warfare, and each of the three following cavaliers represents one of the stereotypical evils of war: sword, famine, and plague."⁵²³ The white horse also represents warfare, but the warfare of the preaching of the gospel. Douglas Kelly adds that "every time the gospel is preached, it's like a sword coming down from Christ" as further is depicted in Revelation 19.⁵²⁴

The first rider on the white horse went out winning and to win. The concept of victory is proper associated to Christ and his followers in Revelation. Thus, those two white horses at the beginning and at the end (Rev 6; 19) of the entire process of salvation should be seen as pointing out to the same one, and the battle in which he is engaged is the battle of the truth, the battle for the gospel. The battle for salvation of the world had a very crucial point at the coronation of Jesus (Rev 5), and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples to start the preaching of the gospel is properly depicted by this white horse in Revelation 6:2. Stefanovic argues that "the rider on the white horse symbolizes the triumphant spreading of the gospel initiated by Christ on the cross and begun at Pentecost." He adds that in Revelation, "white

⁵²² Phillips, *Revelation*, 208-209.

⁵²³ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 395.

⁵²⁴ Douglas Kelly, *Revelation*, 117.

always, and without exception, refers to Christ of his followers and is never used with references to the forces of evil.”⁵²⁵

The first horseman rides out “conquering and to conquer” (Rev 6:2). Lenski explains that the present participle “conquering” is descriptive. The ἵνα clause with the subjunctive aorist (which is similar to an infinitive), “and to conquer,” means to “conquer completely, with finality.” Thus, the “use of two expressions emphasizes the conquering carrier; first, its course, next, its finality.”⁵²⁶ However, Murphy argues that this conquest is not complete and definitive until “Christ rides out on his white horse” in Revelation 19. So, what the first horseman begins, the second one finishes. He adds that the victory of the first horseman is emphasized by the repetition sentence, “he went out conquering and to conquer.” The motif of victory is also expressed by “his riding on a white horse and being given a crown.” In this way, the horse imagery evokes “a triumphant commander riding in the victory parade.” Besides, Murphy argues the fact a crown “was given” him shows that “God gives him the victory, since throughout Revelation, the word ‘to give’ indicates God’s allowing or causing things to happen through intermediaries of one sort or another.”⁵²⁷

Therefore, the final battle of Armageddon in this perspective is seen as the climax of the battle of gospel’s preaching instead of a physical or military battle. This very battle begins when Christ assumes all the authority and the dragon was cast out from heaven (cf. Rev 5; 12).

⁵²⁵ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 233. Stefanovic adds that “when Christ was exalted on the heavenly throne, at the right hand of the Father, he began the expansion of his kingdom by waging warfare against the forces of evil” (Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 79).

⁵²⁶ Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 223.

⁵²⁷ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 205.

The vision of the triumphant white horse at the final of Revelation attests his completely victory in salving people to God's kingdom.

The Battle of the Word of God

The vision of Revelation 19:11-21 is composed of three parts, beginning with three "I saw." Firstly, the description of a "white horse" on which is seated the "Word of God" (19:12-13). The description follows the same pattern of Revelation 1, 4, and 6. At the beginning, John saw a "seven golden lampstands" and somebody walking among them (Rev 1:12-13). He also talks about a "throne" and somebody seated on it (4:2). Then he describes four "horses" and riders seated on them (6:2, 4, 5, 8). Thus, by describing firstly the "horse" and after the "rider," he put the horse as the main symbol of the vision. This means that he is talking about a "battle" first of all, as he talks about "power" and "authority" by describing the throne firstly than God who seats on it. After the description of the white horse and its rider, John says that the rider is followed by the armies in heaven. The rider has a sharp sword that comes from his mouth to "strike the nations" (19:15).

The second part of the vision is the invitation by an angel to the "birds that fly in the midst of heaven" to take part in the "supper of the great God." They will eat "flesh" of kings, commanders, captains, of horse and their riders (19:17-18).

Finally, the third part of the vision retake the language of previous visions (19:19-21). John talks about the "beast," the "false prophet" who performed signs, the "kings of the earth," and their "armies," who are "gather together" to make war against the "King of kings" (cf. Rev 13:13-14; 16:13-14; 17:14; see also 9:1-21). However, there is no description of war at all. John only says that the beast and the false prophet "were cast alive into the lake of fire"

and the rest of their armies was killed by the “sword which proceeds from the mouth” of the rider (19:20-21).

With this picture John tells about the great battle for which the armies are prepared. The first one is in “heaven” and is clothed in “fine linen, white and clean,” seated on horses. They are the army of Christ perhaps who started to follow him as the Revelation disclose from chapter 6 through 19. This is the army of the 144,000, a very cavalry. Its commander is the very Word of God, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. The other cavalry come from the abyss, also seated on horses (cf. Rev 9). Its commander is the very king of the abyss, Abaddon or Apollion. The battle is the very Armageddon whose result will be the demonstration about who is the true God worthy of worship.

In this context, the armies of God come from “heaven” (Rev 12:1; 14:6-12; 19:14) while the armies of evil come from the abyss or the earth (9:2; 12:13; 13:11; 17:8). In Revelation 16:12 and 14 the two armies are depicted in direct confrontation: the “kings from the east” and the “kings of the whole world.” But the “drying up of the waters” to give pass to the kings from the east indicates who will win this battle.

It is very proper that John uses here three times the Greek word στρατεύματα (“troops,” “armies”) and besides here only in 9:16 to talk about the demonic cavalry. Lupieri considers that in 19:14, στρατεύματα describes the heavenly cavalry, “like the troops in 9:16 to whom they are contrasted with respect to their horses and clothing, their clothing being the only detail used to describe their persons in both passages.”⁵²⁸ It is interesting to realize that the war motif is also emphasized in 19:14 by the use masculine verbal form ἐνδεδυμένοι

⁵²⁸ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 305.

("clothed," from ἐνδύω) to describe the heavenly armies. Lupieri observes also that, while the Satanic army has a number, "heard by John at 9:16, here [19:19] there is no number." The army of God is "in heaven" and follows the King of kings as the number of the "one hundred forty-four thousand," who are also masculine and follow the Lamb in 14:4.

John nowhere tell us the color of the clothing of the "one hundred forty-four thousand," but the "great multitude" mentioned immediately after them in 7:9 are characterized by their "white robes," just as the heavenly army is now characterized by its whiteness: their clothes are not simply white, but of "fine linen, white, pure."⁵²⁹ Knight considers that the distinctive feature of this passage is that the angels, like Christ, are seated on white horses. For him, the angels' white linen dress indicates their "heavenly origin and implies their ethical purity."⁵³⁰

The nature of the battle of Christ against the dragon in Revelation is better understood when one considers the weapon used in it. In the beginning of the visions John saw Jesus at the heavenly temple and he observes that "a sharp two-edged sword" (ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα) came out of his mouth (Rev 1:17). He mentions this sword twice in chapter 2 (v. 12, 16) and recalls it again twice in the battle in chapter 19 (v. 15, 21). With that sword he will "strike the nations" (19:15).

In this context, Yattes highlights that in this manner Revelation indicates that the only weapon Christ will use to defeat his enemies is the "sharp sword of the word of God" (v. 21). In a similar way, "the faithful saints conquer by the word of their testimony" (cf. 12:11). He concludes that "the only real victory in Revelation is the sacrificial death of Jesus." Thus,

⁵²⁹ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 305.

⁵³⁰ Knight, *Revelation*, 138.

“victory belongs to the victim” in Revelation. On the battle of Revelation 19, Yattes states that the name of the “warrior” is the “Word of God,” and his only weapon is the “word of his mouth.” He understands the mention to the “winepress” (19:15) as a reference to the cross, where the blood of the heavenly Warrior was shed “before the confrontation.” Thus, he concludes that in Armageddon there is no battle because “the victory has already been won by Christ on the cross” (cf. Isa. 11:1-5; Rev 19:20).⁵³¹

In a similar line, Osborne defends that “the battle will be over in a millisecond when the sword comes out of the mouth of Christ (19:15) and annihilates his enemies” (cf. 14:20; 19:15, 21).⁵³² According to his perception, “it seems that when the sword comes from Lord’s mouth (19:15), the battle is over instantly.”⁵³³ Aune also defends that the “sharp sword issues from his mouth with which to strike the nations” is a “metaphor for the Word of God.” He recalls that the phrase ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, “the word of God,” occurs five times in Revelation (1:2, 9; 6:9; 19:13; 20:4), the plural form οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ, “words of God,” twice more (17:17; 19:9). He understands that in both singular and plural forms the phrase means “gospel,” that is “the Christian message of salvation.”⁵³⁴ Yattes adds that with the sharp sword of the Word of God is used “only against the nations, not the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.”⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Yattes, *Revelation*, 359.

⁵³² Osborne, *Revelation*, 593.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 689.

⁵³⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1058.

⁵³⁵ Yattes, *Revelation*, 359.

However, the Greek verb for “striking the nations” (πατάσσω) is used elsewhere of God’s judgment on the evil people (cf. Matt 26:31; Luke 22:49; Acts 7:24; 12:23; Rev 11:6). And the most usage of ἔθνος (“nations”) in the immediate context is to talk about the evil people deceived by the beast and the harlot (cf. 13:7; 14:8; 16:19; 17:15; 18:3; 20:3). Thus, the intended meaning is that Christ faces the nations in their wrath against his people by using his sword, the Word of God (cf. 11:18).

In the gospels, Jesus did not fight against Satan with human weapons but the Word of God. In the desert he said to him “It is written!” and, by doing so, he defeated the enemy (Matt. 4:4, 6, 7, 10). The war in which the disciples took place when Jesus saw “Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18; cf. Matt 10:7) was one with spiritual weapons, that is the Word of God as well. In Revelation, since the battle described in 12:7-12 is the crucial war between Christ and the dragon, the nature of this war needs to be applied to the battle of Armageddon. In Revelation 3:21, Jesus makes the promise to share the throne with “him who overcomes” *as* he “also overcame.” His victory is the example for the victory of his servants, the victory of the self-denying, by submitting himself to the Word of God. Thus, the Word of God in Revelation 19 is the very weapon through which the rider and his armies overcome the battle. Armageddon is a spiritual battle, for hearts and minds.

On the vision in Revelation 19, Johnson recalls that the evil armies “fall before the sword (word) of Christ” (v. 21). He says “no battle is actually fought,” but “only the arrangement of the foes and the defeat of the beast is described.” According to him, this is not accidental. Maybe John is indicating that “the battle has already been fought and this is simply the final realization of that previous victory.” He argues that in Revelation 5, the Lamb had overcome (won the victory) by his death (5:5, 9). In Revelation 12, John reports that battle as

taking place in “heaven,” but he is referring to the battle that resulted in the defeat of Satan who “was cast out” by being “defeated by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his followers’ testimony” (cf. 12:7-9, 11).⁵³⁶ In this line, Resseguie adds that although the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies assemble to wage war against the rider on the white horse and his armies (19:19), there is no battle described at all. “For the outcome has already been decided by the rider with his blood-stained garment. Christ’s death and resurrection won the decisive battle.”⁵³⁷

The Greek phrase ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ, “to judge and make war with righteousness,” is not used here exclusively in connection with the “destruction of the rider’s enemies.”⁵³⁸ Aune defends that the phrase has the positive connotation of the “salvific action of Christ toward his people.” He goes forth by saying that when God is described in the Old Testament as “judging with righteousness,” it can be applied to “the nations as well as to his people” (cf. Psa 9:8; 72:2; 96:13). He understands that this is an allusion to the Hebrew text of Isaiah 11:4, a passage in which it is said of the ideal king, the “stem of Jesse” (mentioned in 11:1), that “he judges with righteousness” and “then destroys the wicked.”⁵³⁹

Thus, the battle of Armageddon described in Revelation 19:11-21 seems to be the same battle for the “mind of the people” in which the Word of God is the exclusive weapon of the warriors. The victory over the enemies is not by shedding their blood, but to prove that God is

⁵³⁶ Johnson, “Revelation,” 576.

⁵³⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 240.

⁵³⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1053.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

righteous in everything he does and he is ever worthy of worship as the true and only God. This victory is of the same nature of Christ's victory in the desert and on the cross.

The understanding that Revelation 19 depicts the second coming when Christ would overcome and destroy the evil armies of the beast to deliver his people from their hands somehow still reflects the notion of Armageddon as a military battle. In this traditional view, the beast and the kings of the earth would face Jesus in his Parousia to try to annihilate his people and hold the control of the world by using human weapons against the faithful, Jesus, and the angels. There is no room in Revelation for this view considering that the brief mention to the Word of God overcomes the battle instantly. There is any possibility to the kings of the earth face Jesus in his glorious return. Before this event, those armies will be completely terrified under the expectation of the impending judgment that weighs on them (Rev 6:15).

Who Fights the Last Battle

The battle of Armageddon as a spiritual battle according Revelation is fight for two armies, one from heaven and another from the abyss. They contest for the mind and heart of the people in the last days. As the Word of God, Christ is the commander of the heavenly armies, and the angel of the abyss named Abaddon is the commander of the evil armies. Since John says that the battle between Michael and the dragon included the angels of both sides (Rev 12:7-9), who will fight the last battle of Armageddon should be answered from the background of this crucial battle reported in the gospels. One should consider also that "angels" in Revelation language sometimes are "messengers." Indeed, the battle in Christ's ministry included the disciples and the Pharisees and others opponents as well, besides angels from both sides.

According to the descriptions in Revelation 12 and 19, John literary talks about angels engaged in the battle at Christ's ministry and Armageddon as well. He also talks about "angels" in the trumpet's report in Revelation 9, and he does the same in the three angel's messages (Rev 14) and in the description of the work of the "three demons" who are fallen angels (Rev 16). The heavenly armies in Revelation 19:14 are clothed in "fine linen." This is an important point in considering their identity.

In this regarding, Aune recalls that in the Old Testament and early Judaism, "the angels of God are frequently conceptualized as a heavenly army," while the "holy ones" or "saints" have come to be understood as "previously deceased Christians." Meanwhile, he adds that "both angels and the host of saints accompany Christ" in *Ascension of Isaiah* 4:14-16.⁵⁴⁰ According to him, however, the phrase "white, *pure* linen" makes it obvious that these "white garments symbolize the purity and holiness of this heavenly army," and this would be the only place in Revelation where heavenly figures are said to wear βύσσινον, "linen garments."⁵⁴¹ In a similar reasoning, Swete understands that "armies of heaven" following the white rider should be considered as "an angelic host." In his reasoning, in a traditional view, he refers to the coming of Jesus with angels at the Parousia (cf. Matt 13:41; 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess 1:7).⁵⁴²

Indeed, John uses βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν to describe the clothes of the bride of the Lamb that are "fine linen, clean and bright" and explains that this "fine linen" is the

⁵⁴⁰ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1059. Cf. Gen 32:1-2; Josh 5:14-15; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Kgs 6:17; 2 Chr 18:18; Ps 68:18; Dan 7:10; Joel 2:11

⁵⁴¹ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1060.

⁵⁴² Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 253.

“righteous acts of the saints” (Rev 19:8). John says also that the harlot Babylon clothes “fine linen” (βύσσινον) but her clothes are also “purple, and scarlet” (18:16), indicating that she pretends to be in “fine linen,” but her clothes are stained by her “scarlet” sins. However, it is interesting to realize that when John describes the clothes of the very seven “angels” who have the bowls and clothe “pure bright linen,” he does not use βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν but λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν (cf. Rev 15:6). He seems to reserve βύσσινον to talk about the clothes which were made clean by the blood of Jesus, the clothes of the saints. Or at least to indicate that the redeemed are included in the heavenly armies as well as the angels.

In this line, Yattes argues that the “armies of heaven” are connected to the “Lord of Hosts” (*Yahweh Sabaoth*). But he argues that the clothing of the armies, “fine linen, white and pure,” makes it clear that “they are not literally an army at all, but the martyrs or faithful saints, the 144,000” (cf. 1 Thess 3:13; see also Rev 2:10; 3:21; 3:4-5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9-17; 14:4-5; 19:8; 22:14). Yattes still adds that their white garments and “white horses” identify them with Christ and symbolize “the victory of those who are faithful to death and perhaps also their purity and holiness.”⁵⁴³ Thomas argues that heavenly armies’ clothing in “white, pure fine linen” reveals that “instead of being dressed for battle, as the armies in 9:16-19, these armies are dressed for a joyous festival of celebration.” He adds that “such identification between the rider and his armies imply that they have overcome and been victorious in the same way, through their faithful witness even unto death.”⁵⁴⁴ In this bases, he concludes that these heavenly armies who follow the rider on the white horse no doubt point to the 144,000 “who follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (cf. 14:1) and “those called and elect and faithful

⁵⁴³ Yattes, *Revelation*, 358.

⁵⁴⁴ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 580.

who are with the Lamb who makes war” (cf. 17:14).⁵⁴⁵ Krodel adds that, if these armies symbolize the martyrs, then “their garments are white because they have washed them ‘in the blood of the Lamb’” (7:14).⁵⁴⁶

Therefore, by using the description of the clothes of the heavenly armies John seems to talk about the saints, the 144,000, the faithful of Jesus. This does not mean that he was not including angels as well.

In Revelation, the battle Armageddon is the climax the long battle between Christ and Satan. A crucial war of this battle took place at incarnation, the ministry of Jesus, and at the cross. Thus, if these arguments about who is engaged in the last battle as the “heavenly armies” are correct, the vision described in Revelation 12:7-9 should include also the followers of Jesus as part of his armies. In this case, Revelation would describe the battle between Christ and Satan as a war contested by angels and human beings as well. Indeed, the disciples of Jesus took part in the preaching of the gospel and that battle resulted in the casting out of Satan according to Jesus (Luke 10:18; cf. Rev 12:10). The disciples were anointed to preach the gospel and set free Satan’s prisoners (cf. Matt 10:5-15). In fact, the demons were expelled by the disciples, in the name of Jesus. That was a clear war including angels, demons, and human beings. The Pharisees as well as Roman soldiers were involved in the battle in Christ’s ministry (see Matt 4:11; 26:53; Luke 22:43; John 12:29). Since John is depicting this gospel battle in Revelation 12:7-9 (cf. John 12:31), he suggests the inclusion of the disciples as part of the Michael’s “angels,” and the Pharisees and Sadducees as well as the Roman

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Krodel, *Revelation*, 323.

soldiers as part of dragon's "angels" (Rev 12:7).⁵⁴⁷ In this line, since Armageddon is the last battle between Michael and the dragon, the armies engaged also include angels, demons, and human beings. However, besides heavenly angels and the faithful, all the powers on earth will take part in this great battle.

The universal dimension of the last battle is depicted in Revelation 16 by placing in contrast the "kings from the east" and the "kings of the whole world." Lupieri considers that those second are the "allies of the forces of evil from which they are gathered." According to him, this contrast brings a "cosmic dimension to the conflict."⁵⁴⁸ Thomas adds that the expression "all the kings of the whole world" makes the focus broad to a universal dimension.⁵⁴⁹ He argues that Revelation 16:16 imply that "the demonic spirits had been successful in drawing together all the kings of the earth through the performance of signs."⁵⁵⁰ The gathering of powers (Rev 19:19) in opposition to the rider on the white horse is "very reminiscent of those who have been gathered together by the demonic spirits to the war of the great day of God (16:14), the battle of Armageddon (16:16)."⁵⁵¹

In this line, Beale explores the parallel between Revelation 19:19 and 16:14 about the gathering of the kings of the earth to make war. He concludes that in 19:19 John is reporting

⁵⁴⁷ Aune says that "since this figure rides at the head of a heavenly army (v. 14), it would be natural and logical for the reader to construe this rider as Michael, who led an angelic army in battle against the dragon and his angels in 12:7. The color of the mount, however, would seem to point toward identifying the rider of the white horse in Rev 6:2 with the Messiah" (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1053).

⁵⁴⁸ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 241.

⁵⁴⁹ Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 482.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 484.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 587.

the sequence of the gathering of the king by the demons. In this case, the universal “confrontation between the forces of the beast and Christ at the end of the age” will include angels, human beings, kings, and all the power of the earth.⁵⁵²

In another perspective, LaRondelle defends that the human participation in Armageddon is restricted in the victory of Jesus, not in the battle itself. He even comes to say that “the book of Revelation places God’s faithful people at the center of the battle of Armageddon.”⁵⁵³ However, about the “the nature of the participation of the new-covenant saints in the apocalyptic war,” he does not see them engaged in the very battle. He states, “In Revelation the saints are spiritually in the warfare against the forces of darkness—‘They overcome him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death’ (12:11).” But for him, the “saints will participate in Christ’s victory, not in his battle (17:14).”⁵⁵⁴ Aune sees in this direction as well. He argues that Revelation 19:12 “omits any reference to the conflict itself and emphasizes only the capture or decimation of the enemy” (cf. 17:14; 20:7-10). He says that the army accompanying the rider is again mentioned in v. 19 (the earlier reference in v. 14 would suggest an angelic army), but it “apparently plays no part in the conflict.” According to him, “the faithful play no role at all, in sharp contrast with some references to the final eschatological battle in Jewish apocalyptic literature.”⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 835.

⁵⁵³ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues,” 377. See, for example, Rev 16:15; 14:6; 18:3; 12:17; 13:18; 17:4; 19:8.

⁵⁵⁴ LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” 149.

⁵⁵⁵ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1065.

In a different manner, Stefanovic sees the vision of Revelation 19:14, with the rider coming down from heaven with his armies, as “a clear allusion to Revelation 17:14,” where the Lamb faces the battle with the beast and the kings of the earth with the participation of the elects. From this connection, he states that “this heavenly army [Rev 19:14] is most likely the saints ... under the leadership of Christ in the final battle of this earth’s history.”⁵⁵⁶ Indeed in Revelation the faithful are constantly encouraged to win and overcome from the letters throughout the book (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21). Actually, they win and overcome at all (Rev 12:11; 15:1-3).

Thus, the people of God are completely involved in the last battle. Sometimes they are depicted as “heavenly armies” that may include the angels, and sometimes they are the 144,000 army.

What is interesting about the connection between Revelation 19:14 and 17:14, done by Stefanovic and others, is that Revelation 17 talks about the judgment and destruction of the harlot Babylon by the hands of her allies and lovers, the kings of the earth. But this strange act of the kings against the harlot Babylon (17:16) takes place after their war against the Lamb (17:14). Thus, according to Revelation 17:14, the beast and the ten kings make war against the Lamb before they destroying Babylon. If the mention in Revelation 19:19 on the beast and the kings in war against the rider is the same war in Revelation 17:14, this war takes place before the fall of Babylon. Therefore, after the kings make war against the Lamb and his army and be defeated, they destroy the harlot Babylon (17:14; 17:16). Their hate against Babylon seems to result from their defeat by the Lamb and his armies. Babylon could not sustain them, then they come against her. This strengthen the perspective of the battle a spiritual war. The kings will

⁵⁵⁶ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 565.

lose the battle because the armies of God will be succeeded in preaching the gospel on earth by the presence of Holy Spirit on them (cf. Rev 14:6-11; 18:1-3).

Therefore, in the events that characterize the close of human history, according to Revelation, the people of God “emerge as men and women of courage and fortitude.” At the climax of the crucial conflict, “they are alert and informed by the Scriptures, so as not to be deceived by the miraculous phenomena associated with the false system of worship.”⁵⁵⁷

In this line, Stefanovic defends that, in Revelation 19:11-19, Jesus is followed by his armies who are in heaven, and these armies are the saints of the Most High. According to him, Christ is referred to as “Lord of lords and King of kings” and is accompanied by those who are “called and elected and faithful” (Rev 17:14; cf. 19:16). He argues that the titles “called,” “elected,” and “faithful” in the New Testament are consistently used with reference to God’s people (cf. Rom 1:6-7; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Pet 2:9). Besides, the epithets “lords” and “kings” must be taken in reference to the “saints who are elsewhere in Revelation identified as “kings and priests” (cf. Rev 1:6; 5:10; cf. 20:4, 6). “They are in Revelation 7 symbolically portrayed as an eschatological army organized into 144 military units of 1,000 (7:2-8) ready to engage in the last battle.” They are referred to as “the armies which are in heaven” (19:14) because the 144,000 in Revelation are seen as “already being in the heavenly places” (cf. Rev 14:1; 15:2; 19:1-5). In Revelation 15:2, this same group of spiritual warriors are described as “those who had overcome the beast and his image and the number of his name.” Finally, the saints as

⁵⁵⁷ William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” In *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Book II (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 38.

Christ's "armies which are in heaven" thus stand in opposition to the "kings of the earth" who are "under the leadership of the satanic trinity" (cf. Rev 16:14; 19:19).⁵⁵⁸

Therefore, Armageddon as a battle for the mind of the people in the last days will be fought by the armies of Jesus who are his faithful people engaged in proclaiming the three angel's messages. They are depicted as military armies to highlight their role as Elijah's role at the Carmel. They fight the opposition to the truth and the gospel and are able to defeat it by the power of the Word of Jesus which they have treasured in the lives.

In this perspective, the description of the last battle in Revelation 19:11-21 is not of a military and bodily confrontation, but as of spiritual confrontation to demonstrate who is the true God and what is his truth revealed in the Scriptures.

Some question why John does not describe a very war in Revelation 19, since he is depicting the climax of Armageddon.⁵⁵⁹ Possibly, the omission of a broad description of a battle in Revelation 19 as the final Armageddon may have two main reasons in John's theology: (1) the victory of Christ in Revelation takes place at the cross not at the end of time (cf. Rev 5; see also 3:21; 12:5, 7-11) as occurs in the gospel of John where the hour of his glory is at the cross as well (cf. John 12:31; 17), and (2) the second coming of Christ takes place after his enthronization not at the end of time (see John 14).

John does not seem to dwell on the second coming of Jesus in glory and majesty with the angels in heaven. Aune says that the "traditional Christian imagery associated with the

⁵⁵⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 495.

⁵⁵⁹ Thomas says that "the battle is not described in any great detail. In point of fact, the battle is not really described at all, only its results" (Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 588). According to Yattes, in Revelation 19 "no literal battle is described, and the spiritual warfare that ensues is fought, not by demonic and angelic beings, but by real persons who align themselves with the beast or Lamb (Eph 6:10-12)" (Yattes, *Revelation*, 36).

Parousia is largely absent from 19:11-16.”⁵⁶⁰ John describes only the result of this coming. In the Fourth Gospel, the permanent and intimate presence of Jesus maybe leads him to omit this theme so clear in the synoptics.⁵⁶¹ For him Jesus is present all the time with the church (John 14) and his victory is reached in his death (John 17). Although that, the last battle is real and it is fought cruelty with temptation, persecution, imprisonment, and death, but its defeat has been already defined. By the part of the people of God, their participation in the last battle is to be understood from the background of the three angel’s messages. The messengers of God will complete their task, they will finish their mission, they will unmask Babylon before the world, and they will proof who is the true God worthy of worship. But, even in this task, the power of the Holy Spirit on them is the crucial point, because their motivation and empowerment come from Christ.

Thus, the identity of Christ’s “army” in Revelation 19:14, 19 provides new ways for understanding the nature of the last battle. The active role of the saints in the fall of Babylon becomes clearer when one considers the identity of the armies involved in this great event.

How Ends the Last Battle

John says that the drying up of the Euphrates prepares the “way of the kings from the east” (Rev 16:12). Since the fall of Babylon at the sixth plague as we have discussed mark the end of the battle of Armageddon, the drying up of the Euphrates waters symbolize the crucial

⁵⁶⁰ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1059.

⁵⁶¹ Thomas Wearing states that “the second coming of Jesus, which was so closely connected by the early Christians with the last day and the general judgment, does not figure in the Fourth Gospel at all.” Besides, “the dominant thesis of the Johannine treatment makes the second coming of Jesus a work of supererogation entirely. For the early Christian eternal life was to begin in the new dispensation. For the Fourth Gospel eternal life begins in the present for all who believe in Jesus” (Thomas Wearing, *The World-view of the Fourth Gospel: A Genetic Study* (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 1918), 33.

movement in the world that paved the way to the final triumph and exaltation of Christ and his armies. After losing the battle for God's armies, the coalition of the enemies will break up. The political power will destroy the religious power, and a great cry and lament will cover the earth. God will be completely justified to bring the judgment to the evil world through the glorious coming of Jesus.

Some read the expression "the kings from the east" (Rev 16:12) as portraying the coming of Christ with his angels. The phrase alludes to Cyrus and his allies in overpowering the ancient Babylon, coming from the "east" (Isa 41:2; 45:21). In Revelation, however, the expression may be an allusion to Christ and his saints, who, as "kings," will "reign" upon the earth (Rev 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5; Dan 7:18, 27). Angels are never referred to as kings. John also says that the "armies that are in heaven" follow Christ (Rev 19:14). Again, some think in Jesus and his angels. But the saints are called "the host of the heavens," against whom stands the "little horn" (Dan 8:10). The adjectives "called, elected, and faithful" (Rev 17:14) as we have seen are used for the saints (Rom 1:6, 7; 1 Cor 1:2). The garments of the "army" and of the saints are the same "finest linen, white and pure" (Rev 19:14, 8).

Accordingly, Stefanovic argues that, in the New Testament, the phrase "the rising of the sun" or "east" is often used "metaphorically with reference to Jesus Christ." He is called "the sunrise" (cf. Luke 1:78) and the "morning star" (cf. Rev 22:16). "Jesus describe his return to the earth as from the direction of the rising sun (Matt 24:27-31). In Revelation 7:2, the angel with the seal of God comes from the rising of the sun."⁵⁶² Therefore, the expression to "prepare the way for the kings from the east" may suggest an adjustment in the affairs of the world to enthrone the kings, who are Jesus and his saints (see Rev 3:21; 11:17; 20:4; cf. Matt

⁵⁶² Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 494.

3:3; 21:8, 9; Luke 1:76; 19:38). This such an event shall take place at the Parousia. But as we have seen, by the languages and symbols of warfare and confrontation, the very Parousia could not be the focal point in Revelation, but the victory and coronation of Jesus and his armies. This is a very interesting point when one considers that Revelation 5 shows the heavenly coronation of Jesus, and 11:17 preview his final coronation at the end over the earth.

Thus, the vision reported in Revelation 19:19-21 unfold that one mentioned briefly in 17:14, without narrating a battle scene. The beast, the false prophet, and the kings of the earth with their armies altogether are overcome, but only the outcome of the battle is told.⁵⁶³ John only tells the destiny of them: the beast and false prophet are thrown down alive into the lake of fire, and the rest were slain by the sword of the word of God.⁵⁶⁴ The reason to such a summoned description of the last battle could be that in John's mind the battle is not defeat at the second coming of Jesus, but before, as we have seen. John talks about this battle from the visions in Revelation 9, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 17.

The explanations on Armageddon are done through the description of the evil cavalry from the abyss and their work (Rev 9), the persecution of the dragon against the remnant (12:17), the war of the beast and the image of the beast against those who don't have the mark of the beast (13:116-18). It is described through the campaign of the three angels to preach the everlasting gospel to the whole world (14:6-11), and through the descending of the powerful angel to decree the fall of Babylon (18:1-3). It is also described through the plagues that

⁵⁶³ See Krodel, *Revelation*, 324.

⁵⁶⁴ Stefanovic recalls that the mention of the "sword" (Rev 19:21) is an allusion to the Mount Carmel event, when 850 false prophets were slaughtered by Elijah (1 Kgs 18:40). At the same way, "the followers of the satanic trinity will be defeated in a similar way with the sword coming from the Christ's mouth (cf. Rev 19:21)" (Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 497).

Michael bestow over the evil world to defend his people from persecution (16:1-12), and through the war of the beast and the ten kings against the Lamb and his elected (17:14). All of those reports are talking about the defeating of Armageddon. Thus, in Revelation 19 there is no more war to be described but only its final results: the enthronement of the kings from the east and the annihilation of their enemies. Thus, “there is no description of any battle. The armies of heaven are arrayed for a wedding rather than for a war. The warrior King conquers not through military power, but through the sword proceeding from his mouth.”⁵⁶⁵

In this perspective, the broader context of Armageddon suggests that “the kings of the east” as well as the rider and his “army” are Jesus and his saints in an image of their final victory in Armageddon. The imagery of the heavenly cavalry in Revelation 19 may be seen in this perspective as a broad picture that portrayal the battle of the Word of God in long duration from the starting-point of the cross until the coming of Christ. The rider on the white horse recalls the beginning of Christ’s battle in the first seal as the white horseman. In this whole process, Jesus as the rider and his faithful overcome their enemies. This is portrayed by such a symbolic cavalry that run over and trample their opponents completely and definitely. The context indicates that the saints play an active and cooperative role in the battle and the victory of Christ that results in the definitive fall of Babylon. John states, “those who are with him [Christ] will also overcome” (Rev 17:14).

Therefore, at the beginning, the climax of the battle of Armageddon will be critical for the saints, and many of them may be killed (Rev 13:15). However, even in a critical situation, the remnant accomplishes their mission in restoring the biblical truth on the earth and

⁵⁶⁵ Donald Guthrie, *The Relevance of John’s Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 102.

unmasking Babylon (Rev 14:6-12) which prepares the way for its fall (Rev 18:1-3). However, throughout every one plague, the enemies are oppressed and the saints are vindicated. The “drying up of the waters,” indicating the breaking of Babylon civil support, marks the decisive turning point in which the remnant is exalted and their enemies are humiliated in deep mourning.

CONCLUSION

The book of Revelation presents itself before the reader as a very complex literary work. John the seer had visions from God about the whole history of salvation and report them in a very artistic text. There are a great number of characters, events, locations, images, narratives, phrases, and wording from the Old Testament and others Jewish literatures interwoven throughout his prophetic account. This complex composition suggest that John had a very broad memory able to keep and employ in his work a huge number of fragments of others texts and narratives and reinterpret them in the New Testament perspective about the soon coming of the kingdom of God. Besides the intertexts, Revelation also displays a very complex structure with heptads, introductory scene of heavenly temple, interludes, and flashbacks. All of this makes Revelation a very challenging book to be interpreted. This is true especially when we are to understand what John says about the last battle, called Armageddon. Because this complexity, there are a great number of different views about this eschatological conflict.

Throughout Christian history, the book of Revelation has been object of many interpretations in terms of models and schools. Some interpreters understand that John is not a prophet at all. He only had a creative mind to report his ideas and the experiences of the Christian church of his past time in an artistic language, that is, the apocalyptic literary gender. Others believe that he was not only a foreseer but that his visions are able to predict precisely historical events, dates, and characters in future. Another group sees his work as a huge

literary corpus able to teach ideas and truths to encourage the people of God in all the time. Also, there are those who understand that Revelation of John is a special work to reveal the last events prior to the second coming of Jesus in an ever-close future eschaton.

For the most of those interpreters, however, the apocalyptic account on Armageddon has a clear and indisputable view on the last battle between good and evil, Christ and Satan. Even the preterists understand that John talks about the last battle by foreseeing it as the very eschatological moment of the coming of God's kingdom according to his view.

By observing the setting of Armageddon in Revelation it is perceptible that, although John mentions this battle only once, his book is full of this battle motif. And John's attention is very focused on this great confrontation in all his visionary narratives, especially those from chapter 12 through 19. Thus, the word "Armageddon" is used only once (Rev 16:16), but it is very rooted in all the apocalyptic visions.

In Adventist understanding of the last battle called Armageddon, according to LaRondelle, there was a first view according to which Armageddon was the last confrontation between Christ and Satan and their respective armies around the Sabbath motif. But this more religious and spiritual view on Armageddon was replaced by a more secular and political perspective that endured from 1860s until the first half of the twentieth century. From 1950s a more Christological understanding arose and has been predominant nowadays. According to this understanding, Armageddon will be a very religious battle in which the people of God confront their opponents with the Bible truth, the true worship, and the everlasting gospel. By depicting this confrontation, John talks about three spirits of demons like frogs (Rev 16:13) who perform signs and drive to the kings of the earth to gather them together against the

people of God. They are false prophets who try to counterfeit the work of God performed by the three heavenly angels (Rev 14).

This view of a religious and spiritual Armageddon marked by a great work of falsification on the part of demons connects the last battle to the fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev 9) which also foresee a huge demonic work in the last days. This understanding has received many scholarly support through the works of LaRondelle, Paulien, and Stefanovic in the last decades. And by the part of protestants and evangelicals in general, scholars like Aune, Beale, Osborne, Murphy, Krodel, Thomas, and Johnson among others, from various perspectives, have done important exegetical and theological contributions to understand what John really wanted to say about the last battle between good and evil.

In the recent Adventist understanding, the deliverance of the faithful from their oppressors at the climax of the final crisis is usually viewed as taking place at the second coming of Christ. This would be the very moment in which God arises to defend his people from their persecutors. The most general view is that Armageddon will be defeated after the sixth plague when the demons start to seduce the political and civil institutions of the world to gather them together and make the final effort against the people of God on earth. In this perspective, the work of the demons would take place after the sixth plague, and Armageddon would occur at the very seventh plague and endure until the Parousia.

The most of recent Adventist scholars understand Armageddon as the last religious confrontation, centered in the preaching of the everlasting gospel. However, they emphasize that in the battle of Armageddon the enemies would persecute the faithful until the last moment when Jesus at the Parousia would deliver them has its main focus on the persecution motif, not on the proclamation of the Bible truth. Meanwhile, especially LaRondelle, Paulien,

and Stefanovic have understood clearly Armageddon as the tensest moment in the spiritual conflict between the remnant depicted by the three angels (Rev 14) and their opponents depicted by the three demons (Rev 16:13). Meanwhile, the view of a latter Armageddon after the sixth plague may empty this last confrontation of its meaning. How could we understand Armageddon as the battle for the mind of the people if this confrontation takes place after the close of the heavenly ministry of Jesus when all the people on earth will already have taken their position and assume their side in the conflict between God and Satan?

Indeed, LaRondelle even says that God sends three angels to “announce his final warning to all who live on earth in order to *counteract* the work of the ‘three evil spirits’” (cf. 14:6-9; 16:13, 14). He stress that the three angels do their work of proclamation *while* the “three satanic spirits influence the political rulers of the whole world ‘to gather them for the battle’ against God at Armageddon (Rev 16:14, 16).”⁵⁶⁶ Paulien also comes to say that “the two proclamations [of the angels and the demons] go out to the world *side by side*.” Besides, he says that “the preaching of the true gospel is the context in which the end-time deception functions.”⁵⁶⁷ By his turn, Stefanovic states that the work of three frog-like demons (Rev 16:13) as “Satan’s powerful agents of propaganda ... clearly reminds us of Revelation 13:13-14.”⁵⁶⁸ About the work of the demons in the fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev 9), he says that “during these intense demonic activities ... God makes a special effort to reach human hearts by offering the everlasting gospel to earth’s inhabitants” (cf. Rev 14:6-13).⁵⁶⁹ This reasoning

⁵⁶⁶ LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation*, 151, italics mine.

⁵⁶⁷ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 160, italics mine.

⁵⁶⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 500.

⁵⁶⁹ Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation*, 117.

clearly suggest that the demons play their role before the emergence of the image of the beast, and therefore before the plagues.

Therefore, these Adventist scholars clearly understand Armageddon as a confrontation between the Bible truth and its falsification, between the true worship to the creator God and the worship to the dragon and the beast, and between the work of the remnant and their counterfeiting on the part of spiritualism which perform “great signs” to deceive people. This understanding requires an earlier Armageddon, before the plagues, before the close of Jesus’ ministry in heaven.

The main goal of this present book has been to discuss the proper time when Armageddon will get its *start*, whether after the plagues or before them. In doing that, we actually have put in discussion the very nature of Armageddon. And the most important conclusion of this research has been that Armageddon has more to do with the proclamation of the gospel in face of the huge work of falsification and parody by the part of spiritualism than with persecution by the part of the secular and political powers. Although that, the present author does not ignore that persecution and trials will be faced by the people of God as part of their challenges in the last battle. Indeed, it is very clear that the crucial moment of Armageddon as a religious battle for the proclamation of the everlasting gospel will start when the political and military forces of the earth enter into the war on behalf of the enemies of God’s people.

In fact, John says that the demons like frogs “gathered” the kings together in “*the place*” called Armageddon (Rev 16:16). The use of the Greek definite article before “*place*” suggest that in John’s mind Armageddon was a known place. Maybe he had in mind the “battle” as a warfare mountain that he had mentioned many times in Revelation (Rev 9; 12;

13; 14). In this case, the kings which are the political powers enter into a war that was already being fought until then, but only by the religious powers.

In this perspective, Armageddon is seen as the spiritual confrontation that takes place “side by side,” as Paulien says, between the remnant people of God who are restoring the truth on earth from 1844 and their counterpart who are those who sustain a gospel disconnected from the law of God and those who don’t believe in the gospel at all. In this view, the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant between God and his creation is at the center of Armageddon. The Sabbath in this line has to do with the worship to the true and only creator God. In restoring the Sabbath as the memorial of creation, the remnant has restored the very altar of the true worship against the worship of the dragon, the beast, and the image of the beast. The worship of the false trinity in this perspective is very linked to the false gospel disconnected from the law of God which is maintained for the most part of Christianity nowadays.

In discussing this main point, we have worked with the meaning of the sixth and seventh bowls plagues, the connection between the three demons like frogs (Rev 16) and the demons like locusts and cavalry (Rev 9), and the picture of the rider on the white horse and his armies (Rev 19). The central point in trying to identifying the starting time of Armageddon with the inclusion of the political powers of the earth in support to the evil religious power is dealing with the textual unity of the three demons like frogs in Revelation 16:13-14. We have understood this textual unity as a kind of interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls, like John does with interludes like flashbacks between the sixth and the seventh elements in the seals and trumpets account. The conclusion of this discussion is that the three numbered heptads (seals, trumpets, and bowls) have this pattern in placing this flashback that takes a look on a past moment to clarify the topic in view at the climax of the sixth element. Those

numbered heptads also follow the literary feature of the creation account in Genesis, placing the seventh element isolate and distinct from the six previous ones. The seventh element in this reading is seen like the Sabbath when there was no longer work to do after the sixth day in creation.

In this reasoning on Armageddon and the last bowls, the seven final plagues are seen as the divine judgment to defeat the enemies and protect the faithful. At the sixth one, the coalition of the enemies will be defeated by God's intervention. Thus, God's intervention in the time of trouble, to set his people free from their enemies, take place through the plagues before the coming of Jesus.

The confrontation between the remnant and their opponents will get its tensest moment with the emergence of the image of the beast. Persecution and trials will challenge them as an attempt to struck their work of proclamation of the everlasting gospel. However, the presence of the Holy Spirit will sustain them until their task had been fully accomplished. Meanwhile, with the bowls, God will vindicate his people. Those who don't have the seal of God will be affected by the plagues, but they won't affect the faithful. Although that, the faithful will be under oppression by their opponents. But the sixth bowl will mark the moment of the inversion when the enemies will face a huge fragmentation, and among them the political power will hate and destroy the religious power. The resulting destruction of the harlot Babylon will immerse the evil whole world into a consequent condition of deep mourning, cry, and terror just before the coming of Jesus.

Thus, with the image of the drying up of the waters, the sixth plague foresees the *breaking* of the support of the kings to the harlot Babylon, not their *gathering* for battle. In this

line, the tensest moment of Armageddon would begin before the plagues with the emergence of the power of the image of the beast and it should extend until the sixth bowl plague.

In this perspective, the saints play an active role in Armageddon. They restore the truth on the earth and unmask Babylon, which prepares the way for her definitive fall. The climax of Armageddon is extremely critical for the ungodly, with an unprecedented lament at the sixth plague. However, it is greatly positive for the saints, who are preparing themselves to receive their Lord and take possession of the kingdom prepared for them since the foundation of the world.

This understanding of the last battle as a religious battle around the Bible truth and the true worship, in focus from the 1950s, has restored the view of the Adventist pioneers. Besides, by placing in discussion an earlier Armageddon, it seems that we can get even closer to the pioneers' view.

Ellen White foresees the climax of the final battle as a moment of victory for God's people, implying an earlier Armageddon. In her view, before the plagues, Satan is at work to "gather" the kings together to Armageddon. In 1890, she wrote:

The present is solemn, fearful time for the church. The angels are already girded, awaiting the mandate of God to pour their vials of wrath upon the world. ... Satan is also mustering his forces of evil, going forth "unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world," to gather them under his banner, to be trained for "the battle of that great day of God Almighty."⁵⁷⁰

In this text, she is quoting Revelation 16:13-14. Therefore, according to her, more than 100 years ago Satan was *already* working to gather the "kings of the earth" in his campaign against the people of God. This is a clear reference to the work of the three demons reported in

⁵⁷⁰ Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:983.

the literary context of the sixth plague. Without this technical term, she is considering Revelation 16:13-14 as a kind flashback.

The Millerite interpreters understood that the plagues were being poured out in their time, but Seventh-day Adventist pioneers saw differently. LaRondelle states that Ellen and James White initiated the new view that “the seven plagues were still in the future.”⁵⁷¹ Later, when the phenomenon of modern spiritualism was interpreted by the Seventh-day Adventists as a fulfilment of the demonic spirits in Revelation 16:13-14, a question arose. “If the sixth plague was already in process of fulfilment in Spiritism, why would the seven plagues be still in the future?” Uriah Smith responded that “only the sixth plague required a *special preparatory work* by the demons before the actual plague came.”⁵⁷²

In 1902, by predicting the final crisis because of the restoration of truth, Ellen White reiterated: “A terrible conflict is before us. We are nearing the battle of the great day of God Almighty.” She added, “Very soon, will be fought the last great battle between good and evil. The earth is to be the battlefield—the scene of the final contest and the final victory.”⁵⁷³ In this text, she states that Armageddon will spread throughout the earth. She visualizes the confrontation to take place after the union of church and state, which will create the conditions for the Sunday decree and persecution of God’s faithful people.

Therefore, Ellen G. White recommends that we need to study the pouring out of the vials, because “the powers of evil will not yield up the conflict without a struggle.” However,

⁵⁷¹ LaRondelle, “Armageddon: History of Adventist Interpretations,” 436.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 437, italics mine.

⁵⁷³ Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2001), 250. First in *The Review and Herald*, May 13, 1902.

she states, “when the earth is lighted with the glory of the angel of Revelation 18, the religious elements, good and evil, will awake from slumber, and the armies of the living God will take the field.”⁵⁷⁴ According to her, this glorious angel represents the descending of the Holy Spirit on God’s faithful remnant.⁵⁷⁵ In this line, she considers the context of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit as the tensest moment of Armageddon.

About the emergence of modern spiritualism, by the light given her, in the ninetieth century, Ellen G. White said that “fearful signs of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons. The spirits of devils will go forth to the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to fasten them in deception, and urge them on to unite with Satan in his last struggle against the governor of heaven.”⁵⁷⁶ In this quotation she visualize the work of the demons in the last days in the same viewpoint we discuss on the fifth and sixth trumpets. And she adds that those demons play their role by going forth to the “kings of the earth and to the whole world” in fulfilling their task. By doing that, she connects the meaning of those trumpets (Rev 9) to the work of the three demons like frogs in Revelation 16:13-14.

In view the grievous moments of the last battle, in 1890, Ellen G. White said, “The power of the Holy Ghost must be upon us, and the Captain of the Lord’s host will stand at the

⁵⁷⁴ Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:983.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 7:984.

⁵⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1907), 624.

head of the angels of heaven to direct the battle. Solemn events before us are yet to transpire.”⁵⁷⁷

May God sustain his people in the critical moment of their final battle on earth. The study of his Word is a mean to strengthen the heart and mind to go forth to fulfill the task of the three angels. Ellen G. White also considered that the study of the book of Revelation will be a very important factor in the last revival of the people of God. She says, “When we as a people understand what this book [Revelation] means to us, there will be seen among us a great revival. We do not understand fully the lessons that it teaches, notwithstanding the injunction given us is to search and study it.”⁵⁷⁸

By the grace of God, may this present book among many others contribute to a clearer understanding of our role in Armageddon and to reach the long-awaited revival of the faith and hope in the second and glorious coming of our Lord.

⁵⁷⁷ Nichol, ed., SDABC, 7:982.

⁵⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 113-114.

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