

THE TWO WITNESSES AND THE LAND BEAST IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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The two witnesses of Rev 11:3-7 and the land beast of Rev 13:11-15 are perplexing passages with potent symbols that John enlists in communicating his visions to the members of the seven congregations in Asia Minor. This article proposes a literary and theological relationship between the two witnesses and the land beast. While this proposal is not new, the article aims to develop more fully the relationship between the land beast and the two witnesses in the following manner: (1) by examining the Old Testament background of especially the land beast; (2) by strengthening the relationship between these two passages on the basis of verbal and thematic parallels; (3) by articulating a freshly nuanced position on the identity of the land beast in contradistinction to other scholarly views; (4) and by demonstrating an aspect of the cosmic conflict between the two witnesses and the land beast.¹

¹The literary and theological relationship between Rev 11:3-7 and Rev 13:11-15 has only been explored by a few scholars. A monograph on the chiasmic relationship between these two chapters has been written by Antonius King Wai Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiasmic Reading of Revelation 11:1-14:5*, LNTS 283 (London: T & T Clark, 2005) who will be an important conversation partner in this article. The most detailed comments are those of Edith Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas*, JSPSup 17 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 100, in which she states that “the two witnesses are foiled, for example, by the two beasts. This is underscored by the time period used in both chapters (1260 days = 42 months at 11:2, 3 and 13:5), and by the early reference to the beast in 11:7.” She also refers to the contrasting reactions to the wonders performed at 11:13 and 13:4. The earliest reference I could find that refers to the relationship between the two witnesses and the land beast is that of Martin Kiddle, *Revelation* (London: Hodder, 1940), 252-54. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 707, follows Kiddle but does not develop the idea any further. Other commentators make only passing reference to the relationship between the chapters. John Sweet, *Revelation* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 46, suggests that “there is no structural break at the end of chapter 11 . . . the references to ‘three and a half’ bind 11-13 together.” Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 367; Craig Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 30, and Louis Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999) also provide passing reference to this literary relationship. The most sustained development of this relationship is the work of Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002). Cf. Kenneth Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 172-196.

The cosmic conflict between God and Satan is an important biblical background against which to understand the book of Revelation and is the framework within which this article will explore the relationship between these two entities.² Further, the scholarly consensus is that the Old Testament is indispensable for a responsible interpretation of the book of Revelation.³ Gregory Beale says, “the Old Testament in general plays such a major role that a proper understanding of its use is necessary for an adequate view of the Apocalypse as a whole.”⁴

The methodology in this article builds on the work of Jon Paulien and Beate Kowalski.⁵ We will not be slavishly following Paulien and Kowalski in

²See Sigve Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of the Apocalypse*, LNTS 337 (London: T & T Clark, 2007). Recent scholarly discussion has denoted the cosmic controversy more explicitly: see Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997). Idem., *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Peggy L. Day, *An Adversary in Heaven: Satan in the Hebrew Bible*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). Boyd, in particular, has demonstrated how the notion of combat myth is central to the thinking and worldview of many cultures. He correctly asserts, however, that the mythic combat stories in these cultures anticipate the warfare worldview found in Scripture. While I have cast the cosmic conflict as the central background against which the book of Revelation must be understood, Adela Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 232, sees “the paradigmatic character of Rev. 12 for the book as a whole” as “illustrated in terms of the pattern of the combat myth.” She argues that the entire book of Revelation must be seen within this mythic combat. For critique of Collins see Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 62. The cosmic conflict is especially portrayed in Rev 12–14. The notion of a final conflict between God and Satan is anticipated in the eschatological period which would result in Satan's defeat (see 1QM 15.12-16.1; 17.5-8; 11QMelch 13-14; *T. Levi* 18.12; *T. Dan.* 5.10; Sibylline Oracles 3.796-807; *T. Jud.* 25.3).

³A number of important monographs have been written: Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003) and Marko Jauhainen, *The Use of Zechariah in Revelation*, WUNT 2. Reihe 199 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

⁴G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSOTSup 166 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 61.

⁵Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, AUSDDS (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 156-157 and Beate Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge 52 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 57-59. Their methodology is built on the

the implementation of the methodology but it will serve as a guide in our interpretation. The text reads:

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

This is an intriguing passage full of cryptic symbolism. A number of scholars restrict the identity of the land beast to the first-century C.E. context. An example is the following comment by Brian Blount: “Because John’s mythical portraits often have historical referents, this false prophet [referring to the land beast] is likely also a cipher or a [prophetlike] person or entity who encouraged devotion to the Roman beast. John probably had in mind the people and infrastructure that institutionally embodied Asia Minor’s commitment to the imperial cult.”⁶

While the symbols can be applied to the first-century context in which they emerge apocalyptic symbolism often has a cosmic sweep that must be taken account of.⁷ Furthermore, scholars fail to take seriously enough the prophetic nature of Revelation and that the symbol of the land beast therefore addresses issues beyond John’s day.⁸

following principles. First, Scripture is given in the time, place, language, and culture of the specific writer/audience. Second, Scripture employs the language of the past to describe and explain the present and the future. Cf. J. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative, A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 37 and Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 201.

⁶Brian Blount, *Revelation*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 257. After reviewing a host of suggestions that scholars have put forward, David Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (Dallas: Word, 1997), 756, asserts “that the beast from the earth represents the imperial priesthood.” Steven Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 203, contends that the land beast points to the elite families in Asia Minor. These elite families “led sacrifices, underwrote festivals, built temples, voted honors and so forth as part of their full range of civic duties. The elite families mobilized the masses in support of the emperor and enhanced their own standing in the process.”

⁷See K. Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, SBT 2/22 (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1972), 28-33.

⁸The identification of the exact genre of the book of Revelation is a complex issue that is beyond the purview of this article. See the following important discussions: David Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” in *SBLSP*, (ed.) Kent Harold Richards (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 164-165;

There are no historical referents or precedents to a number of events that John points to in Rev 13:11-15. First, there is no evidence that any individual or entity was able to call fire down from heaven for public viewing as John writes in Rev 13:13.⁹ Second, “there is no evidence to demonstrate that an image of the emperor could speak and mandate worship in the late first-century C.E.”¹⁰ Third, there is no evidence in the first century C.E. that the whole world population was marked with the mark of an entity that enabled them to advance economically.¹¹

Fourth, scholarly attempts to calculate the number 666 to signify Nero, Domitian or another Roman emperor have not secured any firm consensus.¹² Fifth, while John states that the land beast had the power to kill those who refuse to worship the image of the first beast, no elite families or authorities had such power and there are no historical references to such an experience.¹³ I will argue that the symbol of the land beast has applicability beyond John’s day to the time before the *parousia*.

Determining Symbols

The symbol of the beast has been introduced by John in Rev 11:7. There the beast is in opposition to the two witnesses. The adversarial relationship between the beast and the two witnesses is evident in John’s use of the idea of make war (ποιήσῃ μετ’ αὐτῶν πόλεμον), overpower (νικήσῃ) and kill (ἀποκτενεῖ) and its emergence from the abyss is in similar fashion to the

David Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65-96. In my view all three aspects of the genre, namely, apocalyptic, prophetic, and epistolary, need to be kept in mind in the process of interpretation. While I disagree with the literalist interpretation put forward by Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 29-39, his analysis of what constitutes prophecy is helpful. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 25-28, maintains that (1) the gift of prophecy involved the divine inspiration of the spokesperson or writer; (2) the prophetic gift provided exhortation and encouragement; (3) the gift incorporates prediction of the future into its function; (4) the gift of prophecy entailed some degree of authority; (5) the NT prophet had the ability to discern the truthfulness of other prophecies; (6) most NT prophecy was oral but some was written. The New Testament clearly predicts developments that will affect the church. The “man of lawlessness” will arise before the *parousia* (2 Thess 2:3); there is to be a “falling away” or rebellion (Acts 20:29, 30); times of stress will arise (2 Tim 3:1-9); and persecution will increase (1 Pet 4:12).

⁹A. K. W. Siew, *The War between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 268.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 270.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 271. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 516, contends that “there is no evidence that the death penalty had been imposed during Domitian’s reign.”

locust plague of Rev 9:1-2. The beast of Rev 11:7 “comes up” (ἀναβαλῖνον) from the abyss while the land beast “comes up” (ἀναβαλῖνον) from the earth. The verbal parallels suggest that the beast of Rev 11:7 is the same as the beast of Rev 13:11.

The phrase “another beast” (ἄλλο θηρίον) points to a relationship of continuity between the sea beast of Rev 13:1-10 and the land beast. There are a number of striking similarities between the sea beast and the land beast.¹⁴

Sea Beast	Land Beast
Ascends from the sea (v. 1a)	Ascends from the earth (v. 11a)
Has ten horns on its head (v. 1b)	Has two horns like a lamb (v. 11b)
The dragon gives authority to the first beast (v. 2)	The sea beast gives its authority to the land beast (v. 12a)
The world is amazed at the sea beast whose fatal wound is healed (v. 3)	The land beast makes the earth worship the sea beast whose fatal wound is healed (v. 12b)
The sea beast speaks arrogant words (v. 5)	The land beast speaks to deceive (v. 14)
The sea beast makes war and conquers the saints (v. 7)	The land beast kills those who refuse to worship the sea beast (v. 15)

The verbal and thematic connections between the two beasts suggest a very close relationship between them. The principal description of the land beast is that it speaks like a dragon though outwardly its horns are those of a lamb. This beast therefore looks like a lamb—gentle, small, and timid. On the other hand, it speaks like a dragon indicating that its very person is corrupt and violent. The aforementioned table points to continuity between the land beast, the sea beast, and the dragon. According to Siew, “what is striking is that the land beast appears to be like *the Lamb* but its nature takes after *the Dragon*.”¹⁵ The land beast’s parody of the Lamb Jesus is weak, however, since Jesus the Lamb has seven not two horns (see Rev 5:6). Furthermore, the real Lamb Jesus died in sacrifice and weakness and was raised by God’s power. The fake lamb promotes the sea beast who pretends to have recovered from a similar fate to that of Jesus.¹⁶

The land beast emerges from the earth. The symbol of earth has both good and bad connotations in Revelation. The inhabitants of the earth (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) are on the wrong side of the conflict in Rev 11:10; 13:8, 14; 14:6.¹⁷ The earth is seen in a positive way in Rev 12:16

¹⁴Ibid., 176.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 351.

¹⁷According to Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 239, the term is used in Revelation to consistently designate those in opposition to God and the faithful

where the earth helped the woman.¹⁸ However, as the narrative of Revelation continues the earth is filled with fornication and corruption (Rev 14:3; 17:5). The symbol of earth therefore points to an entity that God uses to protect his church and preserve its welfare but in the period before the *eschaton* the earth becomes more corrupt.¹⁹

The beast has two horns which generally point to political power.²⁰ The land beast entices the inhabitants of the earth to set up an image to the first beast. Old Testament writers refer to the inability of images and idols to speak and act (see Ps 115:4-5; Isa 46:7; Jer 10:5) because they have no life in them (Ps 135:17; Jer 10:14; Hab 2:19).²¹ However, the land beast is able to make the image speak.

The Land Beast—Counterfeit Holy Spirit

The book of Revelation depicts an unholy trinity in the form of Satan, the sea beast, and the land beast.²² The phrase “fire falling from heaven” (πῦρ ποιῆ ἔκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβαίνειν) would remind John’s hearers about the falling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2. The land beast is a counterfeit of the work of the Holy Spirit as it brings down fire from heaven just as the

community. Furthermore, Bauckham states the term τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐρανὸν ten times in Revelation (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 (twice); 13:8; 14 (twice); 17:8; 17:2 (where a stylistic change is made). *Contra* Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 524, who sees the term occurring nine times only.

¹⁸Beale, *Revelation*, 643-646. John is alluding extensively in Rev 12 to the exodus experience in the symbols of “wilderness,” “the two wings of an eagle,” and “the earth.” The earth swallowing the flood is a clear allusion to Exod 15:12 where the earth swallowed the Egyptians when they attempted to destroy the Israelites by pursuing them into the Red Sea. Later in the wilderness the earth also swallowed up and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their families. According to Beale, *Revelation*, 675, “in both instances, God caused the earth to open and swallow that which opposed the establishment and welfare of his people.”

¹⁹Edward Adams, *The Stars will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007) argues quite persuasively that the human space time continuum that is this world, will be destroyed at the *parousia*.

²⁰On the horn symbolism, see Margit L. Süring, *The Horn-Motif in the Hebrew Bible and Related Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Iconography*, AUSDDS 4 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980).

²¹Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 421.

²²For various discussions on the theme of an unholy trinity in Revelation see: Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 368-373 and James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 104, 124-128. According to Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 161, the concept of a satanic trinity comes from Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817).

Holy Spirit did at Pentecost.²³ It also works miracles on behalf of the sea beast (see Rev 13:12, 14). Because of this work, the land beast is later called the “false prophet” (see Rev 19:20).

Stefanovic provides the following table:²⁴

The Land Beast	The Holy Spirit
Called the false prophet since it deceives people (16:13; 19:20; 20:10)	Identified as the Spirit of truth (John 16:13; Rev 22:17)
Lamb-like (13:11)	Christ-like (John 14:26; 16:14)
Has the authority of the sea beast (13:12a)	Has the authority of Christ (John 16:13-14)
Directs worship to the sea beast (13:12b, 15)	Directs worship to Christ (Acts 5:29-32)
Performs great signs (13:13; 19:20)	Performs great signs (Acts 4:30-31)
Brings fire down from heaven (13:13)	Comes in fire at Pentecost (Acts 2)
Applies the mark on the hand or forehead (13:16)	Applies the seal on the forehead (2 Cor.1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30)

The thematic parallels suggest that the land beast is a deeply spiritual and yet deceptive entity. Its spirituality, however, is not of God but of the devil. The Holy Spirit makes the blessings of salvation by faith through grace alone a reality in the heart and life of a believer (Eph 2:8-10; Titus 2:13). The Holy Spirit leads people into all truth (John 16:13). Strikingly, the land beast has an appealing personal quality to deceive and entice people away from Christ and the everlasting gospel (Rev 14:6). John foresees a time when the land beast will counterfeit the ministry of the Holy Spirit with power and deception.

The Land Beast and False Prophecy

The religious dimensions of the land beast will now further be clarified by examining the internal dynamics of Revelation especially in relation to false prophecy. The symbol of the land beast is connected to Jezebel in Rev 2:20; the false prophet of Rev 16:13, 19:20 and 20:10; and Babylon in Rev 17:1-3 through the concept of false prophecy.²⁵ The concept of a false prophet in

²³Contra Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 127, who says the land beast is not the counterpart to the Holy Spirit.

²⁴Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 371.

²⁵See Leslie N. Pollard, “The Function of *Loipos* in the Letter to Thyatira,” *AUSS* 46, no. 1 (2008): 45-64 and Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 91, for a discussion that demonstrates the continuity between the symbol of Jezebel in Rev 2 and Babylon in Rev 17.

the local setting emerges in Rev 2:20 where John introduces Jezebel as a false prophet. Revelation 2:20 reads:

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

In this verse John highlights five activities that Jezebel is involved in.²⁶ First, she claims prophetic status which is something John calls in to question. Second, she teaches, an activity that also carries questionable associations since it is used pejoratively elsewhere.²⁷ Third, she beguiles or leads the early Christians astray with her assimilationist position in relation to the Roman Empire. Fourth, as a result of the teaching and beguiling activities of Jezebel some of the Christian community are indulging in fornication. Fifth, Christians are also eating food sacrificed to idols.

John was addressing the deceptive anti-Christian teaching that had crept into the church in his day. We might call it Romanized Christianity. The influence of the imperial cult, trade guild festivals, the pantheon of gods like Jupiter and Zeus, and so many other religious practices crept into the framework of Christianity. Compromise and the worship of false gods became more acceptable for the Asian Christians.

The symbol of Jezebel in particular functions as the local embodiment of false prophecy just as the symbol of the land beast functions as a false prophet in an eschatological sense. The notion of a false prophet therefore has both a local and eschatological setting with John ingeniously causing the local or historical to impact and influence the eschatological.

Furthermore, Jesus warned there would be false prophets in his Olivet sermon: “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible” (Matt 24:24). Christ also linked false prophets with beasts. He states in Matt 7:15 that false prophets would “come . . . in sheep’s clothing but are inwardly ravenous wolves.” Beale contends that “the image of the wolf in lamb’s clothing suggests a traitor within the fold of the church.”²⁸ While Beale is correct to assert that false teachers and prophets are misleading members of the seven churches he fails to see this as part of the end-time conflict before the *parousia*.²⁹ Just as the early Christians were following Jezebel so too it appears that Christians will follow the land beast due to its deception and influence in the period before the end of human history.³⁰

²⁶These five points are from Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 115.

²⁷According to Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 115, 165, John only uses the verb διδάσκω in Rev. 2:14 to refer to the teaching activities of Balaam.

²⁸Beale, *Revelation*, 708.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰This view is reinforced when we see the relationship between Jezebel and Babylon.

The Old Testament Background

The notion of two horns (κέρατα δύο) in Rev 13:11 alludes to Dan 8:3.³¹ The Old Testament context needs to be taken into account in interpreting an Old Testament passage used in Revelation.³² The wider context of Dan 8 is not only a conflict between oppressive national powers that sought to persecute God's people but also cosmic powers that seek to challenge the authority and sovereignty of God.³³ Just as a power attacked God's dwelling in Dan 8:10-13 so too does the sea beast in Rev 13:6.

John also alludes to a miracle of Elijah (1 Kgs 18:21-24) by using the imagery of calling fire down from heaven (πῦρ ποιῆ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβαίνειν).³⁴ 1 Kings 18 is about the Mount Carmel showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. John draws on this story to demonstrate the end-time conflict between God's people and those that follow Satan.

In Jewish and Christian circles it was presumed that Elijah would return before the end (see Mal 4:5-6).³⁵ The gospel writers were familiar with this teaching and subsequently identified John the Baptist with Elijah (see Matt 17:9-13). John is drawing on this New Testament background of this understanding of Elijah. By alluding to the Elijah stories in both the Old Testament and New Testament John sets up a dualism between Elijah, the true end-time prophet and anti-Elijah, the false prophet in Revelation.³⁶

³¹Osborne, *Revelation*, 511; Blount, *Revelation*, 256; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 757.

³²David Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Tübingen, Germany: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 1, has demonstrated that the rabbis in pre-70 Palestine studied their sacred texts with due consideration for the literary and thematic context. Brewer summarizes the conclusions to his research: “the predecessors of the rabbis before 70 C.E. did not interpret Scripture out of context, did not look for any meaning in Scripture other than the plain sense, and did not change the text to fit their interpretation, though the later rabbis did all these things.” Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, xi, writes that the allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation are meant to “recall the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusion to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy.” *Contra* Steve Moyise who is opposed to any reading of Revelation that attempts to take into account the intention of John and the wider Old Testament context. See Steve Moyise, “Does the Author of Revelation Misappropriate the Scriptures?” *AUSS* 40, no. 1 (2002): 3-21 and Idem., “Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 39, no. 1 (2001): 35-40.

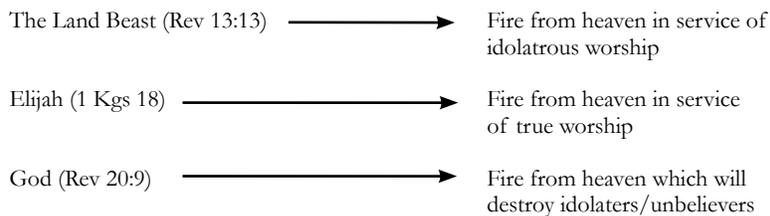
³³Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 122.

³⁴Blount, *Revelation*, 258. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 759, references Artermidorus and a dream of fire carried down to earth. While he is to be commended for finding the parallel, there are no contextual grounds for its use (which is often the case with the use of Greco-Roman sources).

³⁵See Dale C. Allison Jr., “Elijah Must Come First,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 256-258.

³⁶Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 122-123 and Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 421. Osborne,

Commentators are not clear on what the symbol of fire (πῦρ) represents. Morris argues that fire does not destroy the beast's enemies but is "simply meant to arouse admiration."³⁷ This is surely inadequate based on the depth of meaning the notion of fire has in Scripture. Stefanovic is not sure what the fire represents but argues that "it is effective in counterfeiting the truth and the gospel."³⁸ Beale also does not state what the fire is but does highlight the fact that fire comes out of the mouths of the two witnesses (Rev 11:5) where it "portrays the speaking of God's true word."³⁹ Like the symbol of earth and indeed other symbols, the symbol of fire has dual applicability and points to both God's salvific purpose to destroy sin and sinners and the malicious intent of the forces of evil in Revelation to in turn deceive God's people. The following diagram highlights the contrasting ways the symbol of fire is used.



While the land beast/false prophet appears to call fire down from heaven, only God can call down fire from heaven, not to deceive, but to destroy those who have aligned themselves with the unholy trinity. John is appealing to the Elijah stories to portray his local situation *and* the situation of God's people during the end-time conflict. An anti-Elijah power—the land beast/false prophet—will arise in the end-time conflict to act and speak like Elijah to deceive God's people.

The next Old Testament story that is of consequence is that of the three Hebrew worthies in Daniel 3.⁴⁰ The thematic and literary connection comes to the fore in the notion of forced worship and an image (εἰκόνη) set up for everyone to worship. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were told to bow down to the image of the king. The image is sixty cubits high and six cubits wide (see Dan 3:1). John draws on Daniel 3 to set up an intentional contrast with the image in Rev 13:14 and the number 666.⁴¹

Revelation, 513, suggests that the false prophet parodies Elijah.

³⁷Morris, *Revelation*, 167.

³⁸Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 421. Keener, *Revelation*, 351-352 has a discussion about magic but does not address the notion of fire.

³⁹Beale, *Revelation*, 709.

⁴⁰See Keener, *Revelation*, 351; Blount, *Revelation*, 258.

⁴¹H. Ritt, *Offenbarung Des Johannes*, Die Neue Echter Bibel (Würzburg, Germany: Echter Verlag, 2005), 72. The discussion of this number is beyond the purview of this study. For various discussions about the number 666 see Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 769-771. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 761, also sees the connection to Dan 3:4 but does not

Both the Old Testament backgrounds of Elijah and Daniel focus on the issues of worship and a confrontation over worship. In the Elijah story it is religious leaders that force a confrontation over true worship while in the Daniel story it is a political leader that enforces worship. Having established the spiritual dimensions of the land beast together with its Old Testament background allows us to now turn attention to the identification of the two witnesses.

The Identity of the Two Witnesses

The identity of the two witnesses has perplexed scholars for long time.⁴² John has conflated Old Testament symbols in this passage from a range of Old Testament stories that make it difficult to understand. The passage (Rev 11:3-7) reads:

And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Revelation 11:6 recalls the mighty deeds of Elijah who stopped the rain (1 Kgs 17:1-7; cf. Jas 5:17; Luke 4:25) and destroyed his enemies by fire (2 Kgs 1:10-12) as well as those of Moses who turned water into blood (Exod 7:17-21; Ps 105:29; cf. Rev 8:9; 16:3-6) and served as Yahweh's instrument in striking Egypt with plagues (Exod 7-12).⁴³ The primary referent for the two

see the connection with the number 666. Furthermore, Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 46, argues that Nebuchadnezzar was seeking to enforce his will on the populace for religious and political unity. This is indeed the case with the land beast in Rev 13.

⁴²Daniel Wong, "The Two Witnesses," *BibSac* (1997): 347, maintains that the two witnesses are two as-yet-unknown prophets, who will minister in the power of Moses and Elijah during the tribulation period. Charles H. Giblin, "Revelation 11.1-13: Its Form, Function and Contextual Integration," *NTS* 30 (1984): 433-459 (442-443), emphasizes the typological dimension of the two witnesses as expressive of "Christian prophetic testimony which accords with Scripture but transcends those foreshadowings." Paul Minnear "Ontology and Ecclesiology in the Apocalypse," *NTS* 12 (1966): 96-97, argues that they represent the "transcendental model" of all genuine prophecy, the archetype for all true understanding. Recently M. Oberweis, "Das Martyrium der Zebedaiden in Mk.10.35-40 (Matt.20.2-3) und Offb.11.3-13," *NTS* 44 (1998): 74-92, has posited that the two witnesses refer to James and John. See the insightful analysis of the two witnesses by Felise Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride: An Exegetical Investigation into the "Ecclesial" Notions of the Apocalypse* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2007) 197-223, with which I would be in broad agreement.

⁴³Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 275, writes: "In 11.5-6 it is clear that the Old Testament models for the two prophets are Elijah and Moses." Contra Siew, *The War*, 226-232, who argues that the two witnesses are both individuals and the church

witnesses is the *faithful* Christian church that authentically carryings out her prophetic witness during the Christian era and especially prior to the *parousia*.⁴⁴ Bauckham, who is representative of a range of scholars, states

That the two witnesses symbolize the church in its role of witnessing to the world is shown by the identification of them as lampstands (11:4), the symbol of the churches in ch. 1 (1:12, 20). That they are only two does not indicate that they are only a part of the whole church, but corresponds to the well-known biblical requirement that evidence be acceptable only on the testimony of two witnesses (Deut 19:15). They are therefore the church insofar as it fulfills its role as faithful witness.⁴⁵

Beale provides the following evidence for the view that the two witnesses refer to the church: 1) They are lampstands (11:4) which Revelation explicitly identifies as churches (1:20); 2) Just as Joshua and Zerubbabel were the high priest and king respectively seeking the restoration of their holy city, so the church as a kingdom and priests (1:6; 5:10) is seeking their New Jerusalem; 3) Just like John, the two witnesses prophesy (10.11; 11.3, 6) fulfilling the standard Christian mission of testifying for Christ (cf. 19.10) as well as adopting the world-wide responsibility of witnessing (11.9);⁴⁶ 4) The church is called to witness elsewhere in Revelation; 5) The number forty-two months is symbolic and hence the two witnesses would need to be symbolic and 6) The beast of 11:7 fights the people of God in 13:7.⁴⁷

The witnesses are identified as “my two witnesses.” The noun *μάρτυς* (witness) occurs five times in Revelation. Twice it is applied to Jesus (1:5; 3:14) and twice to his followers (2:13; 17:6). The term emphasises the Christological focus of the ministry of the two witnesses. The two witnesses symbolically point to the church of God that is called to live and proclaim the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁸

and George E. Ladd, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 154, who also states that the two witnesses are “actual historical eschatological personages” as well as “the witness of the church to Israel throughout the age.”

⁴⁴Jan Du Rand, *Die A-Z van Openbaring: 'n Allesomvattende Perspektief op die boek Openbaring* (Vereeniging, SA: Christelike Uitgewersmaatskappy, 2007), 370.

⁴⁵Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 85. See Beale, *Revelation*, 272-273, 573; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 603; Barr, *Revelation*, 9; and Keener, *Revelation*, 291-292. J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, 178, is novel. She suggests the two witnesses could represent the house of Israel (laity) and the house of Aaron (the priesthood).

⁴⁶Keener, *Revelation*, 291-292.

⁴⁷Beale, *Revelation*, 272-273.

⁴⁸See Ekkehardt Müller, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” *JATS* 13, no. 2 (2002): 30-45, and Kenneth A. Strand, “The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12,” *AUSS* 19, no. 2 (1981): 127-135, who champion the view that the two witnesses are the Old Testament and New Testament.

The Relationship Between Rev 11 and 13

It will be argued in this section that a literary parallel structure exists between the two witnesses and the land beast and that this points to an aspect of the cosmic conflict between God and Satan in the end time. Literary parallel structures are determined on the basis of a pronounced similarity of concepts, symbols and themes mentioned in a broad basic context.⁴⁹

Literary parallel structures in Revelation demonstrate that the key to interpreting a passage may be found in a literary counterpart elsewhere. Since Revelation was to be read in a worship context, literary parallel structures, which are often repetitive, would have helped John's listeners in understanding significant matters he wanted them to know.⁵⁰ These structures would have also benefited the early Christians and prophets (Rev 22:10) in providing opportunity to compare, contrast, reiterate, and explain the message of the book.⁵¹

The following table outlines the verbal points of contact between Rev 11 and 13.⁵²

The Verbal Parallels between the Two Witnesses and the Land Beast	
Two witnesses (δυσὶν μάρτυσίν) (11:3)	Two horns (κέρατα δύο) (13:11)
Prophesy (προφητεύουσιν) (11:3)	Speak (ἐλάλει) (13:11)
Before the Lord of the earth (ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς) (11:4)	Before him (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ) (13:12)
Fire (πῦρ) (11:5)	Fire (πῦρ) (13:5)
To kill (ἀποκτανθῆναι) (11:5)	To kill (ἀποκτανθῆναι) (13:15)
Have authority (ἐξουσίαν) (11:6)	Have authority (ἐξουσίαν) (13:12)

⁴⁹Kenneth Strand, *Foundational Principles of Interpretation*, 31. For the usefulness of literary parallel structures in the interpretation of Revelation see William H. Shea, "The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20," *AUSS* 23, no. 1 (1985): 37-54; idem., "Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals," *AUSS* 22, no. 2 (1984): 249-257.

⁵⁰See R. L. Jeske, "Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse," *NTS* 31 (1985): 452-466; J. P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17-19:10* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 184-189; U. Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue as a Literary Form in the Book of Revelation," *NTS* 37 (1991): 348-372, who argues that different parts of Revelation are assigned to a lector and the congregation.

⁵¹David Morsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament, A Commentary on Genesis – Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 29, makes similar comments in line with the Old Testament writings which Revelation is of course indebted to.

⁵²Siew, *The War*, 201.

Even though the verbal parallels are weak, they do strengthen the relationship between these two entities. Literary parallel structures are strengthened when there is a good representation of ideas and symbols between the two passages. The themes of war (Rev 11:5-7; 13:4, 7), conquer (Rev 11:7; 13:7) and worship (Rev 11:1, 13:3, 4, 8) unite Rev 11 and 13. The beast which makes a brief appearance in Rev 11:7 becomes the central character in Rev. 13 and the 42 months or three and a half times or 1,260 days (Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5) is found in both chapters.

The notion of war is seen in the use of terms like fire, kill, and authority. The two witnesses direct their fire against the enemies of God's people who in fact try to kill them. On the other hand the land beast uses fire to deceive. While both the land beast and the two witnesses have authority the source and exercise of that authority is very different. The following table highlights the thematic parallels:⁵³

The Thematic Parallels between the Two Witnesses and the Land Beast	
Prophets (11:10)	False prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10)
Perform signs (11:6)	Perform signs (13:13-14; 19:20)
Receive authority from God (11:3)	Receives authority from first beast (13:12)
Torment inhabitants of the earth (11:10)	Deceives inhabitants of the earth (13:14)
Receives breath of life from God (11:11)	Breathes life into image of first beast (13:15)

The combination of both verbal and thematic parallels reinforces the relationship between these two entities. The verbal parallels are of course based on a similarity of language while the thematic parallels focus on similar ideas between the two passages. The signs performed by the two witnesses authenticate their witness while the signs performed by the land beast are designed to deceive. The sea beast has a unique quality, a quality that only God has, in that it can provide life. However, it is given this power by God as the divine passive (ἐδόθη) in Rev 13:15 indicates.⁵⁴ The land beast therefore receives life from the sea beast and exists to carry out its aims and purposes.

Both the land beast and the two witnesses direct their resources at the inhabitants of the earth (Rev 11:10; 13:14). Initially it appears that both entities are seeking to destroy the inhabitants of the earth with the words "torment" and "deceive" used to describe their activities. However, the inhabitants of the earth are tormented by the two witnesses in Rev 11:10 because of their flagrant disobedience of God while the land beast seeks to deceive them. Earlier on though in Rev 11:6 the two witnesses prophesy to the inhabitants of the earth in an endeavour to turn their hearts toward God. Both tables

⁵³Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 128.

⁵⁴Blount, *Revelation*, 258.

suggest that there is an intricate theological and literary relationship between the two witnesses and the land beast.

Conclusion

On the basis of the literary parallel structure we can conclude that an aspect of the end-time conflict before the parousia is between the faithful church carrying out her prophetic witness and the land beast. The literary parallel structure has been strengthened by both verbal and thematic connections between Rev 11:3-7 and Rev 13:11-15. The task and privilege of the church is to proclaim the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Word of God lifts up Jesus just as the Holy Spirit lifts up Jesus (John 14:16-19; 15:7-15). The land beast is opposed to the church, the Word of God, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The land beast is opposed to Jesus Christ because the sea beast is opposed him.⁵⁵

At the same time the land beast is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. This counterfeit spirit attacks the truth of the Word, the truth proclaimed by the church. This conflict is intensely spiritual and will not be evident to the senses. Many commentators get this aspect of the symbolism wrong. Robert Mounce says “in the final days of Antichrist the false prophet stands for the role of false religion in effecting the capitulation of mankind to the worship of secular power. It is the universal victory of humanism.”⁵⁶ Henry Swete states “in its wider significance the symbol may well stand for any religious system which allies itself with the hostile forces of the world against the faith of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ Swete is vague in his comments with the idea of “any religious system.” Mounce, on the other hand, does not clarify what exactly he means by false religion. Is it any religion other than Christianity or can a false form of Christianity be classified as a false religion?

⁵⁵Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 123-125, maintains that commentators are too quick to identify the sea beast with the Roman Empire or the Roman Emperor. He maintains that the symbol of the sea beast points more importantly to a parody of Christ. See the parallels between the sea beast and Christ in Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 370.

⁵⁶Mounce, *Revelation*, 259. Similarly Keener, *Revelation*, 239, says, “Finally the dual nature of the two witnesses provides a literary contrast with the two evil leaders in 13:11-12, one of whom also produces fire (13:13). The anointed king and priest contrast starkly with the wicked ruler and his priest in chapter 13. This portrait reinforces John’s contrast between the church and the world system; the latter holds power to kill God’s witnesses, but the witnesses will triumph nevertheless, even through their sacrifice.” Both Keener and Mounce refer to a world system.

⁵⁷Swete, *Revelation*, 169. In a related view, Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation, A Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 157, claims: “All who support and promote the cultural religion, in or out of the church, however lamb-like they may appear, are agents of the beast. All propaganda that entices humanity to idolize human empire is an expression of this beastly power that wants to appear Lamb-like.”

This article has demonstrated the strong affiliation of the land beast with the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9, 10) and hence the Christian faith would not exist apart from the Spirit. This suggests that it will not be false religion but rather apostate Christianity that will lead humanity to worship a false religious power symbolized in the sea beast of Rev 13:1-10.⁵⁸ The counterfeiting work of the land beast and its extensive influence in the world suggest that the Christian faith will be under serious attack in the time before the parousia.⁵⁹ The Old Testament background of the land beast draws on the Elijah and Daniel stories which focus on false worship. Clearly in Rev 13 the key aspect of the end-time conflict is over the nature, purpose, and function of worship hence Revelation's call to worship the creator (Rev 14:7).

It would appear that the land beast has Christian roots and is supportive of the Christian church and hence the gospel of Jesus Christ but turns against the church to reveal a twisted and evil nature that seeks to destroy the church and all that it represents. John foresees a time when there will be enormous deception and corruption within the Christian community during the end-time. Contemporary Christians are safe only under the blood of Jesus and in obedience to the Word of God (Rev 12:10).

⁵⁸Both Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 420-421, and Brighton, *Revelation*, 358, are closer to this position.

⁵⁹Beale, *Revelation*, 831, maintains that "the false prophet without exception speaks to falsehood *within the covenant community of Israel or the church* in order to deceive (Matt 7:15; 24:11; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; Acts 13:6; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1)." Beale, however, restricts the deceptive activity of the beast to the seven churches which is something this article has argued against.