
The differences and similarities of the beast(s) in Revelation 12 and 13:1-10

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The creatures described in Revelation 12: and 13:1-10 are very similar. However, they have some important differences, namely: the number of horns, the presence of crowns in different places and the relation or identification with the dragon. While almost all interpreters of prophecy have interpreted them to be the same power based on their similarities, how they account for their differences? In the present article, I investigate the similarities and differences of these two beasts of Revelation 12 and 13:1-10 and evaluate the arguments articulated by some Adventist interpreters about this issue.

Keywords: beasts; Revelation 12; Revelation 13:1-10.

Seventh-day Adventists have interpreted the symbolic creatures of Rev 12 and 13:1-10 as referring to Rome. Although the similarities of both creatures are obvious, there are major differences which have not been thoroughly explained.² According to the text both have seven heads, ten horns and some crowns. Both of them also attack God's people and continue for a specific time (42 months; 3 ½ times or 1260 days). But what should we make of the differences in the symbolism, like the number of crowns, seven in Rev 12, and ten in Rev 13:1-10? Furthermore, why in Rev 12 the dragon is the persecuting power while in 13:2 the dragon gives authority to the beast, but interpreters see both as the same power, namely, Rome?

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² Paulien (2009, p. 421) also recognizes that Seventh-day Adventists have not given sufficient clarity to the 1260 period, but his comment is about Rev 11. The point still well taken, many details of Revelation have not been clearly explained.

Ways to interpret prophecy

Apocalyptic prophetic texts are not the easiest parts in Scriptures to understand. The apocalyptic genre is full of symbols because it explains transcendent reality both in space and time (COLLINS, 1984, p. 1-19, specially p.4). The texts under scrutiny here fall in this category of high symbolic content and the reader needs to be careful on how to identify and interpret them. Due to different worldviews regarding divine communication (revelation-inspiration),³ at least four methods have been proposed to interpret this biblical genre: preterism, historicism, futurism and idealism.⁴

The assumption of the reader will determine in large measure the outcome of his/her interpretation of Revelation. But since the focus of this article is to evaluate the textual similarities and differences of the beast(s) of Rev 12 and 13:1-10, I narrow the discussion to the basic common ground of interpretation shared by all methods. Most commentators focus their discussion of the symbolic beasts of chapters 12, 13 and 17 on the identification/interpretation of the heads. For the purpose of this paper, it is not necessary to investigate all the details of those 3 chapters in the book of Revelation, only to evaluate the differences of these beasts. Therefore, an investigation of chapters 12 and 13 are sufficient because in these chapters, and not in Rev 17, the differences of the beasts are most notable.

68

Heads, horns and crowns

Relating to the heads of the beasts of Rev 12 and 13:1-10, there are three main positions: (a) they represent Roman Emperors of the first century, (b) the kingdoms from Egypt to Rome, and (c) not representing specific rulers but symbolic of complete (seven).⁵ With the exception of the full preterists, it seems that interpreters mix

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³ For an Adventist biblical argumentation for the divine method of revelation-inspiration and comparison with other methods see (CANALE, 2001).

⁴ It is not the focus of this paper to explain or critic these methods and their particular interpretation of Revelation. For more on these four methods related to the book of Revelation see PAULIEN (2004, p. 30-34). For a historicist history of interpretation of Rev 12, 13 and 17 see Nichol (1980, v.7, p. 114, 116-118, 124-127). In both references above there is no mention of the differences of the beasts and how to explain them.

⁵ For a basic review of these different positions see Osborn (2002, p. 619-620). For the non-historicist perspective besides Osborne see Ford (1975), Johnson (2006), Keener (2000) and Mounce (1997).



preterism, idealism and futurism, where the horn is somehow related to historical realities of the past (like the Roman emperor Nero) to exemplify a future enemy. In reality, its main goal is to represent the supreme enemy of God.⁶

Intertextuality and recapitulation

It is widely recognized that the symbols used in Daniel are similar to those of Revelation. This method of using previous symbols is called recapitulation.⁷ By recapitulation interpreters mean the repetition of a previous visionary symbol(s) to frame the next vision. This is an important concept to the understanding of both apocalyptic books and it is used, although with different application, by all schools of interpretation.

In Rev 12 and 13 this principle is easily demonstrated. The principle of recapitulation considers similar language/symbols to trace the parallel between visions. In Rev 12 John sees a beast (dragon) having seven heads, ten horns, crowns (seven) which persecutes the woman who serve God for a definite time (1260 days or 3 ½ times). In Rev 13 John sees a beast also with seven heads, ten horns, crowns (ten) and persecuting those saints who serve God also for a specific time (42 months). This repetition is generally understood to mean that the power(s) described in these two chapters are most probably the same. It has been also noticed by all school of interpretation the intertextual reference to the vision of Dan 7, or the recapitulation of Daniel by Revelation, and how the book of Daniel also recapitulate its own visions (chapters 2, 7, 8-9, 11-12).⁸

In Dan 7 the prophet also see beasts, four of them. The focus of the vision, however, is on the last beast, which has ten horns and persecutes God's people. From the head of this fourth beast comes up a little horn that becomes powerful and removes

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⁶ A great example of this kind of interpretation is MOUNCE (1998, p. 245,246, 314-318). He writes that the number of heads and horns are merely symbolic, for they are the sum of heads from Daniel 7, thus it epitomizes the archenemy of God at the end time (p. 245). But at the same he seems to apply the symbolism to individual emperors in the I AD to fit his view of the heads (p. 314-318). See also Johnson (2006, p. 740), Keener (2000, p. 338) and Osborne (2002, p. 620).

⁷ Lehmann (1992, p. 143) concisely define it: "Each section is a sequential resumption of the same global history in order to add details and to progress toward an explanation".

⁸ Although the four schools interpret the text differently, they agree with this same idea of recapitulation. For an Adventist explanation of how recapitulation works in detail in Daniel see Shea (2005), in Revelation see Strand (1992a). For the relation between Daniel and Revelation see Lehmann (1992).



three of the previous ten horns. This horn from littleness persecute the saints during 3 ½ times. In the end of this period the judgment of God is established to destroy the beasts and to deliver God's people. In all these chapters (Dan 7, Rev 12 and 13) there is a terrible beast with ten horns which persecute God's people for a similar time. The similarities are evident. What interpreters have been able to demonstrate through textual parallelism is that all these three chapters uses the same framework and thus, they argue, most probably it refers to the same event. The visions describe a time when the enemy of God persecutes the saints. All the beasts have 10 horns and rule for the same time. But the similarities stop here.

Although recent commentators see the similarities between these apocalyptic texts, very few of them address their differences. They agree with the basic identification of the beast(s) in Revelation 12 and 13:1-10 with the Roman Empire (or pagan Rome). However, only two authors, both Adventist historicists, account for the differences in the description of these beasts and try to respond to it.⁹ Both Johnsson (1992, p. 23, 26, 27) and Strand (1979, p.54; 1992b, p. 184), hint the beasts of Rev 12 and 13:1-10 should not be equated in all particulars, despite their similarities, since they have different numbers and position of crowns.

70

The crown-factor

In their interpretation of Rev 12 and 13 they rightly point out that while the beast in Rev 12 has seven crowns in the head(s), the beast in Rev 13 has ten crowns in the horns. It should also be pointed out that in Dan 7 and in Rev 17, where a beast with seven heads and ten horns is seen attacking God's people, there are no mention of crowns. To these two interpreters these difference in the description of the crowns serve as a marker and therefore are key to understand the symbolism of this persecuting beast.

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⁹ For example, Osborne (2002) sees difference only in the spiritual aspect of Satan's parody of the Father in Rev 12 and the Son Rev 13 (p. 459, 460, 620). He does not mention the differences of number and placement of crowns. Similarly, Ford (1975) identifies the beasts of Rev 12, 13 and 17 as the same powers (p. 210, 220, 285), but he mentions the different description of the crowns in 12 and 13. Nonetheless, this difference is insignificant for the identification of the beast because its purpose is only to leave space in heads of the beast of Rev 13 for names of blasphemies (p. 210).



Taking as reference the literary structure of Strand (1979), Johnsson agrees that the crowns are key to distinguish these beasts and suggests that the difference

may be due to the lapse of time. Satan's depredations through the sea monsters come long after his efforts to kill the holy Child. The description of the sea beast in the Greek text lists the horns before the heads (a unique detail when compared with the other descriptions of these similar-looking figures, Rev.12:3; 17:3) and thus also draws attention to this change in emphasis (JOHNSSON, 1992, p. 27).

But he goes no further in explaining the "lapse of time" and the crown-factor. It is Strand who gives an explanation to the differences in the visions (1992b). Based on his previous work (1979) and on Shea's (1992) about the literary structure of the book of Revelation, Strand argues that the crown-factor marks the *time* of the ruling of these beasts. And this can be only understood when a historicist framework is considered. Consequently, the preterists and futurists are not able to fit all the components together (1992b).

Arguing for a historicist approach Strand shows that in Dan 7 the fourth beast is the Roman Empire from which derive 10 horns and later a persecuting horn from littleness. In Rev 12, the dragon beast persecutes the child Jesus so it must refer to the Roman Empire phase of the beast. In Rev 13, however, the persecution starts and focuses only on God's people. This fits with his understanding of the crown-factor. In Rev 12 the crowns are in the seven heads representing the Pagan phase of Rome, while in chapter 13 the focus is on the horn(s) phase since the crowns are on them.

What Strand's scheme suggests is that in Rev 12 the crowned power, the authority in action, is the pagan version of Rome. By the time John sees the beast in Rev 13:1-10 the crowned power is the ten horns which leads to the papal version of Rome. Taking this difference into account he suggests that the absence of crowns in Rev 17 is because the horns have not yet been crowned when John saw it (v.12) (1992b, p. 184).

How about the dragon-factor?

Despite the tentative of Strand's crown-factor to solve the seemingly discrepancies of the apocalyptic visions of Revelation, it leaves some issues unsolved. One of them is how to explain that the dragon is pagan Rome in Rev 12 while in Rev 13 it gives the power to the beast of seven heads and ten horns? Strand is silent on this.



Johnsson (1992) tries to solve it by suggesting that the beast of Rev 13:1-10 is *like* the dragon, not the dragon itself, for the text says it receive power from the dragon. So, he argues, the focus of the vision is now on the papal and not the pagan phase of Rome (p.23).¹⁰ Behind this answer is the idea that apocalyptic symbols are fluid. The dragon is the devil (12:9) at the same time that it represents the human empires/powers used by Satan to attack God's people.¹¹

The other issue related to the crown-factor is the interpretation of the seven heads. What do they represent taking into account the inclusion or absence of the crowns? Preterists see the heads as a symbol of individuals, Roman emperors (e.g. MOUNCE, 1997, 316-318).¹² The Millerites and early Adventists such as Uriah Smith saw it as representing Roman forms of government (SMITH, 1; FROOM, 1982, vol. 4, p.1118, 1119). Others do not interpret them as specific political powers but are open to the symbolic interpretation of its numbers representing the totality of God's enemy (JOHNSSON, 1992, p. 27; WERE, 1983, p. 188).¹³ The majority of Adventist interpreters understand the seven heads as representing the totality of Satanic enmity against God and His people, throughout history, as depicted in the Bible through the power of specific kingdoms. In this last group of interpreters, there is no agreement where to start counting the seven heads or kingdoms (LARONDELLE, 1997, p.418, 419; NICHOL, 1980, p. 854-855; STRAND, 1992b, p.191).

72

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¹⁰ This interpretation of Rev 13:1-10, applied to the papacy, is not shared by futurists or preterists but was very common throughout history. For the summary of this history see Froom (1982, vol. 4, p.1091, 1092).

¹¹ This principle is shared by White (1950, p.54). In her work *The Great Controversy* she interprets the dragon giving power to the beast (Rev 13:2) as paganism replaced by the papacy. At the same time she applies the time of persecution of 12:6 and Dan 7:25 to the papal phase. For her, the dragon is behind the papacy (p.77), and at the same time behind Herod and the Roman Empire in the time of Jesus (p.438). This is also the view adopted by the *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary* (NICHOLS, 1980, p.807) and Froom (1982, vol. 4, 1118-1119). Froom shows that only Ellen G. White in early Sabbatarian Adventism (1844-1875) saw this fluidity apocalyptic symbol. Others saw the *red* dragon as pagan Rome while the *dragon* (not red) was identified as Satan (e.g. SMITH, 2.). The fluidity of symbols in apocalyptic literature can be also deduced from Rev 17:9 where the 7 heads are interpreted by the angel to John as representing both mountains and kings (this is noticed by KEENER, 2000, p. 409).

¹² For an Adventist response see Strand (1992b).

¹³ Significant in this discussion is Were interpretation of numbers in the Apocalypse in chapter XII of his book.

Conclusion

By investigating the differences and similarities of the beasts in Rev 12 and 13:1-10, I find that all interpreters agree that the beast(s) in both chapters represents Roman powers. The main argument to support this idea is the textual similarities between them and the contextualization to the time of Jesus and John, hence, Roman time. The similarities are: the prophet sees a beast with seven heads, ten horns persecuting God's people for a similar/equal time. These similarities in the description of time, persecution attitude, and the numbers of horns are also connected by interpreters to the vision of Dan 7. Despite the different historical application they give to the beasts of these chapters, they all use the principle of recapitulation to support the link with Rome. Hence, according to the authors considered in this article, what hold these beast(s) together are the time and thematic parallelism.

What is ignored by most of them, however, are the differences, namely, the number and place of crowns and the relationship of the dragon with the first beast of Rev 13. Only two authors, both Adventist historicists, comment on these differences and, consequently, only they try to solve the apparent puzzle presented in Rev 12 and 13. By focusing on the crowns and comparing to its non-existence in Dan 7 and Rev 17, Strand (1992b) suggests a historical sequence of power represented by the presence or absence of the crowns. In this view, Rev 12 depicts pagan Rome for the crowns are in the dragon's head; in Rev 13 the emphasis is on papal Rome for the crowns are on the ten horns. In Dan 7 and Rev 17 there are no crowns described because the powers are still in a distant future from the prophets' perspective. Building on Strand's (1979) perspective, Johnsson (1992) focuses his attention in the relation between the dragon and the beast of Rev 13:1-10. He distinguishes them by arguing that they are alike but different.

These two authors have gone beyond most interpretations of these symbolic creatures, but not all issues are solved. They still leave open the discussion of the fluidity of symbols in apocalyptic literature, or the usage of the same imagery to represent different realities. Also, their interpretation are not applied to the specific identification of the seven heads, a discussion which is extremely important to the understanding of Rev 17. Actually, all authors I investigate interpret Rev 12 and 13 in light of Rev 17, looking at their similarities backwards. However, they overlook the differences in their symbolic description. This short study shows that only two authors have dealt with the differences coherently and, therefore, their conclusions should be seriously considered on further studies on the beasts of Rev 12, 13 and 17.

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74

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75

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