

## NUMBER 666 AND THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

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*Abstract: when confronted with the problem of number 666 (Rev. 13:18), most modern interpreters opt for either the gematric or symbolical explanation. This article expounds on the internal difficulties, errors and successes of these explanations. As a result of the analysis, it is possible to conclude that joining both interpretations is a feasible solution, not only due to the fact that the author of Revelation uses the cipher to conceal a name but also because number 666 clearly indicates the true Christians' antagonists. The analysis of the list of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:4-8) confirms this symbolical and typological reasoning pattern.*

### Introduction

Without a doubt the most enigmatic passage in the Book of Revelation can be found in verses 17 and 18 of chapter 13, in which the author reveals to us the number of the Beast's name, which is 666.

Throughout time, Bible scholars have sought a name that might correspond to this number by taking into consideration not only alphabetical numbering systems but also the anti-Christian aspect of a certain prominent historical character. Parallel to this way of interpreting the issue, another line of researchers has discerned a symbolical quality in this enigmatic cipher from the biblical point of view.

Notwithstanding these efforts, it is possible to observe in both interpretations such a great number of difficulties and errors that it is necessary to review their systems in order to discover the merit of their proposals.

This article seeks to perform exactly such a review by observing the possibility of joining the two interpretations while introducing circumstantial evidence as to the influence of the specific symbolism and typology of number 666 on the formation of the list of the Twelve Tribes of Israel found in Rev. 7:4-8.

### 1. The two main interpretations on number 666<sup>1</sup>

#### *1.1 Interpretation through gematria*

The interpretative side which we shall deal with in this item defends the position that 666 is the result of adding the numbers that correspond to the letters in the name of the Beast (Rev. 13:17; 14:11; 15:2), according to the ancient numeration system used by Greeks and Jews. This operation is called gematria.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the two interpretations presented in this article, there are two others: one that searches for purely mathematical solutions, based on Pythagorean systems, or on other systems; which is the case of G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, in 'Die in der Apokalypse Bekämpfte Gnosis', *ZNW* 13 (1912): 293-305, who proposes the formula  $n(n+1) : 2 = 1 + 2 + 3... + n$ , in order to find the triangular number of 8, which is 666, whereupon making this last number a reference to the eighth king in Rev. 17:11. The other interpretation is of a chronological nature. It considers 666 as the time of duration of the Beast's reign, or the Antichrist's power. There are three different sides to it: (a) 666 years demarks the duration of heathenism up until the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine; (b) a cipher that corresponds to the duration of the Moslem period; and (c) the number represents the duration of the papacy.

<sup>2</sup> The word "gematria" probably comes from the Greek word *geômetria*. Gematria goes back to the times of Assyrian King Sargon II and was used by dream interpreters in Greece, by Persian magi and by the Romans (see Maurice H. Farbridge, in *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* [Trubner's Oriental Series, N. York: 1923]). The Jews came to use it in the apocalyptic literature during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The *Sibylline Oracles* are an example in

The first mention of the use of such a form of interpretation among Christians is found in Irenaeus (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), who recommended awaiting the fulfilment of the prophecy in Revelation in order to know what the name corresponding to number 666 was since a great number of words may contain the cipher. Notwithstanding this, he proposed the Greek names *Euanthas* (“flowering” or “blossoms”, the plural accusative case of *euanthês*), *Lateinos* (“Latin”, in reference to the Roman Empire) and *Teitan* (“Titan”, to indicate a tyrannical king).<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus even mentions a variant of the cipher, 616, to be found in several manuscripts and considered to have been a lapse committed by the copyists.<sup>4</sup> Later Victorinus of Pettau agrees with Irenaeus by repeating *Teitan*, but he adds the names *Antemos* (from Greek, “Opposed”) and *Gensêrikos* (the Greek form of the Gothic *gaisa-reik*, “Spear-King”), as well as the Latin letters DICLVX (corresponding to *Teitan* in accordance with the Roman numerical system).<sup>5</sup>

Considering the persecution of Christians during the first centuries of the Christian Era, the gematric proposals that arise throughout history represent Imperial Roman names and titles, being both numerous and varied. Among them, in relation to 666, we can mention: *Oulpius*, suggested by Grotius, a Greek form of the Latin *Ulpius*, a word that designates Emperor Trajan’s clan; *Diocles Augustus*, referring to Emperor Diocletian, by using the letters DICLVVV, according to the Roman numerical system, created by Bossuet; and the first letters and syllables (marked in Italics) in Autokrator *Kaisar Domēianos Sebastos Germanikos*, Domitian’s Imperial title in Greek, discovered in an ancient inscription, proposed by Stauffer.<sup>6</sup>

For variant 616, the suggestions were: *Kaisar Theos* (in Greek, “God Caesar”), imagined by Deissmann; *Gaios Kaisar*, referring to Caligula, a Greek gematria suggested by Spitta; and the Hebrew title *Qeysar Dwmytyanus* (“Caesar Domitian”), suggested by Hartingsveld.<sup>7</sup>

We can still mention the Hebrew gematria *tehom qadmoniyyah* (“primordial chaos”) for 666, according to Gunkel; as well as *hê latinê basileia* (from Greek, “the Latin kingdom”) for 666, and *hê italê basileia* (“the Italian kingdom”) for 616, created by Clemen.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1831 and 1837 the German scholars Fritzsche, Benary, Hitzig and Reuss independently proposed for 666, *Nrwn Qsr* (a transliteration from Greek to Hebrew of “Nero Caesar”, formed by the letters nun = 50, resh = 200, waw = 6, nun = 50, qof = 100, samekh = 60 and resh = 200, in accordance with the numerical system used in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, which was limited to number 400).<sup>9</sup> As this theory reasserts the legend of Nero *redivivus*,<sup>10</sup> the proposal

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which Book 5 enumerates several Greek names of emperors. In *Orac. Sybill.* 5:12-15 (80 AD) the names of Julius Caesar and Augustus are announced in the following manner: “There will be a first prince who will sum up twice ten with his initial letter. He will triumph in wars over a long period of time. He will have his first letter of ten, so that after him a person will reign whose initial letter is the first letter of the alphabet” (tr. by the author of this article). The use has also been encountered among the Gnostics (see Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.24.7) and especially among the Christians, seeing that the latter even went to the length of adding several passages of gematria to the Oracles themselves around the year 150 AD. A classic example is *Orac. Sybill.* 1:324-331, in which we find number 888 for *Iêsous* (“Jesus”). We have discovered a later Christian testimony in *Barn.* 9:8. Gematria can also be called “isopsephia” or “isopsephism”.

<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.3. Irenaeus quotes *Euanthas* only to demonstrate that any word may contain 666. However, in the metaphorical sense it may mean “Nobles” or “Gods”; *Euanthês* is also one of the god Bacchus’s names.

<sup>4</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.1. Number 616 appears in Ephraimite Codex.

<sup>5</sup> Victorinus of Pettau, *Commentarius in Apocalypsim*: ch. 13 (*PL Suppl.* 1, 110). This work dates back to 300 AD.

<sup>6</sup> H. Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (1644); Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *L’Apocalypse de Jean* (1690); E. Stauffer, ‘666’, *ConNT* 11 (1947): 237-41.

<sup>7</sup> G. A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Hodder and Stoughton, London: 1910); F. Spitta, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes untersucht* (Halle: 1889); L. van Hartingsveld, ‘Die Zahl des Tieres, die Zahl eines Menschen: Apokalypse XIII.18’, *Miscellanea Neotestamentica* 2 (1978): 191-201.

<sup>8</sup> H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen: 1895); C. Clemen: ‘Die Zahl des Tieres Apc 13:18’, *ZNW* 2 (1901): 109-14; ‘Nochmals die Zahl des Tieres’, *ZNW* 11 (1910): 204-23; ‘Die Zahl 666, ein Hinweis auf Trajan?’ *Protestantische Monatshefte* 25 (1921): 144-48.

<sup>9</sup> C. F. A. Fritzsche, *Annalen der gesamten Theologische Literaturzeitung* (Leipzig: 1831): vol. 1, p. 3; F. Benary, *Zeitschrift für spekulative Theologie* (Berlin: 1836); F. Hitzig, *Ostern und Pfingsten* (Heidelberg: 1837); E. Reuss, *Hallesche Allgemein Literaturzeitung* (Sept., 1837).

<sup>10</sup> A rumour that appeared after Nero’s death, according to which he reappeared in Asia after his death to command the siege of Rome with the help of the Parthian army. This rumour was mentioned by Tacitus (*Hist.* 1:2; 2:8-9) and Suetonius (*De Vita Caesarum, Nero* 40 and 57), who talk about the appearances of pseudo-neros in Asia

was accepted by the great majority of specialists despite the fact that it adopted a gematria of Hebrew letters (Revelation was written in Greek and meant for people who spoke Greek; nevertheless, one must remember that the author thought in Hebrew, for he used a lot of Hebraism and committed many grammatical mistakes). In opposition to this gematria, it was stated that *Qsr* was defective, that the correct form was *Qysr* (with the letter yod). Ewald, on the contrary, observed that *Qsr* can be found in Syriac inscriptions and documents discovered in Palmyra, dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>11</sup> Charles reasoned that Marcus Jastrow's dictionary accepted the form *Qsr* (see n. 13), and he even stated the possibility of 616 corresponding to the same gematria without the final letter nun in *Nrwn* (according to a transliteration based on the Latin form of the name).<sup>12</sup> Finally, in the 1950's, an Aramaic document with *Qsr*, dating back to the second year of Nero's reign, was discovered among the Dead Sea scrolls, a fact that ended up confirming the probability of the theory.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2 The symbolical interpretation

Irenaeus was the first one known to have pointed out a symbolical, biblical meaning for 666, even though he did so through a conjugation with gematria by relating it to the recapitulation of iniquity when referring to Noah's 600 years of age, the date of the Flood (Gen. 7:6, 11), and the measurement of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's statue, 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide (Dan. 3:1, 7).<sup>14</sup>

Due to the mention of these passages from the Old Testament by Irenaeus, the followers of symbolism looked through other passages where numbers 6, 60, 600 and 666 appear. Generally, the suggestions of other passages are based on the relations that exist between the circumstances reported or the characteristics of the passages and the human and typological content that they may come to have. Thus, besides Irenaeus's passages, it is common to mention Gen. 1:26-31 (the creation of man on the sixth day of the first week) and 1 Sam. 17:4, 7 (Giant Goliath's height, six cubits and a span, and the weight of his spear, 600 iron shekels). Every once in a while we find a reference in 2 Sam. 21:20-21 (the giant of Gath, with six fingers and toes on each hand and foot, defeated by a relative of David's).

In the search for 666 the scholars found 1 Kgs 10:14-20, 23 (666 talents of gold taken annually to Solomon; cf. 2 Chr. 9:13-24), as suggested by Bede, and Ezra 2:13 (the number of Adonikam's children), suggested by Hengstenberg.<sup>15</sup>

In the attempt to find the meanings that derive from these passages, the conclusion was that number six symbolises man, who is reminded that he will never achieve perfection, since he is not indicated by number 7, which refers to God (Gen. 2:1-3). That being so, number 666 may be the result of multiplying six by 1, 10 and 100, or, because it is composed of three sixes in a row, means imperfect man, completely iniquitous and lost, arrogant and under the pretence of being a

Minor (years 69, 80 and 88 AD), and by the *Sibylline Oracles* (4:137-139; 5:93-110, 137-154, 361-385). The author of Rev. appears to have adopted it in 13:3 and 17:8, 10. It is interesting to remember that Philostratus (*Vit. Apoll.* 4.38) and the *Oracles* (5:343; 8:157) both refer to Nero as a beast.

<sup>11</sup> H. Ewald, *Johanneische Schriften* (Göttingen: 1862): vol. 2, p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (T. & T. Clarke, Edinburgh: 1920): vol. 2, p. 367.

<sup>13</sup> The document was discovered in Wadi Murabba'at (*DJD* II, no. 18, tav. XXIX), as D. R. Hillers reports, in 'Revelation 13,18 and a Scroll from Murabba'at', *BASOR* 170 (1963): 65. It is a loan contract written in Aramaic, containing in its first line the phrase "year two of Nero Caesar"; that is, year 55 AD. The title Caesar was written with the letters qof, samekh and resh. The last two are damaged. Yet it is possible to ascertain that there is not enough space for the letter yod between qof and samekh. It must be said that even if this confirmation were non-existent, *Qsr* would still be possible since there are words that have been derived from it, such as the transliterations *Qsrwn* and *Qsrwyn* ("Cesarea") found in *Oholot* 18.9 (ed. Dehr.) and *Mekhilta B'shallah, Amal.*, s. 2 (see M. Jastrow, in *A Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [London, N. York: 1903]: 1365), and also because of the arbitrary use of vocalic consonants as we can see, for example, in the Hebrew word *gadol* ("great"), spelt *gdwl* in Gen. 4:13 and *gdl* in Deut. 26:8.

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.29.2.

<sup>15</sup> Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis* (PL 93, 172.D E); W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John Expounded for those who search the Scriptures* (Mack Publishing, Edinburgh: 1852).

god, adherent to Evil, referring to 2 Thess. 2:3-8 and, especially to Dan. 7:8, 11, 25-27 and Rev. 13:1-8; 17:8; 19:19-20.<sup>16</sup>

Doubtlessly, it is possible to extract several connections from the texts such as, for example, the giants defeated by David and his relative, reminding us of Jesus, David's descendant, defeating the Antichrist, a powerful man (see Rev. 13:2; cf. 1 Sam. 17:36, as to the figure of the lion and the bear); the Flood, the destruction of humanity, recollecting in anticipation the Final Judgement, coinciding with Matt. 24:37-39 and Luke 17:26-30; and the sensation of fragility and caricature in the form of a strong, gigantic man, a foreign enemy, referring to the archetype in Gen. 6:4, who was easily defeated by the Messiah with a puff of air, as Paul said (2 Thess. 2:8).

Another foundation for the symbolical interpretation is in the use of multiples of six in Revelation (42 and 1,260: Rev. 11:2-3, 9, 11; 12:6, 14; 13:5), forming an apocalyptic mathematical pattern of reasoning that is related to the time of the Beast's governing (a pattern that derives from Dan. 7:25; 8:14; 9:24-27; 12:11-12).<sup>17</sup>

## 2. The analysis of the two interpretations

As we may ascertain, the two interpretations possess apparently convincing foundations within the logic of their interpretative systems. Nevertheless, both present several difficulties.

With regard to interpretation through gematria, though it appears simple and obvious within its historical context and apocalyptic literature, the problem resides in the fact that to discover the name one is obliged to go through a highly complex mental process. One must remember that Revelation, contrary to the pseudepygrapha *Sibylline Oracles* (see n. 2), gives no equation of letters, and the only referential points found that might lead to the name are: the phrase *arithmos gar anthrôpou estin* ("for it is a man's number"); and the revelation of the number that corresponds to the Beast and to its name. Admitting the unanimously accepted theory that the name may correspond to the gematria *Nrwn Qsr* and that the author was actually thinking of the Nero *redivivus* legend, the reader, in possession of only the coordinates represented by that phrase and the revelation of the number, would have to deduce that the Antichrist had to be a person in first place; then, possessed of previous knowledge of the legend, conclude through the analysis of chapters 13 and 17 that John adopted it and that the seven heads of the Beast and the seven mountains were Roman emperors; finally, with the knowledge that the Antichrist was Nero, he would imagine a transliteration from Greek to Hebrew that corresponds to the title "Nero Caesar", but without the letter yod. The complexity of such a process denotes that a common, unprepared reader could not undertake it. He would have to be a person initiated in John's codes, or that he would have to accept the proposal of doing all the mental exercising

<sup>16</sup> The ideas of the multiplication of six by 1, 10 and 100, and of imperfection may first be found in Rupert of Deutz, *Commentarius in Apocalypsim* (PL 169, 825-1214, esp. 1088); and in the *Corpus Thomisticum*, in *Expositio super Apocalypsim*, chs. 13 and 15. A few 20<sup>th</sup> century commentators reaffirm the same ideas, such as: W. E. Beet, in 'The Number of the Beast', *Expositor* 8, ser. 47, 121 (1921): 18-31, esp. 25, who also mentions the thesis of the three number sixes in a row; and Ch. Brüttsch, in *La Clarté de L'Apocalypse* ([Labor et Fides, Genève: 1940]: esp. 26 and 232), who reinforces the imperfection thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Charles (p. 367) mentions some of the theorists who formulated this thesis: Milligan, in *Baird Lecture*: 328; Briggs, in *Messiah of the Apostles* ([C. Scribner's, N. York: 1895]: 324); Porter, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible* 4: 258; and Vischer, in *ZNW* 4: 167-74. Recently, on the other hand, Yarbro-Collins, in 'Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature', *ANRW* 2.21.2 (1984): 1221-87, esp. 1771-72, observes that in no other place in Rev. does number six symbolise imperfection or Evil; that the allusion to three and a half times cannot support the symbolical hypothesis because they derive from the Book of Daniel and its traditions, indicating a specific and limited time of tribulation; that number six is called the perfect number by Philo (see n. 19); and that the Dragon and the Beast are symbolically represented by number 7, not by six (Rev. 12:3; 13:1). However, number six seems to indicate apostasy in Rev. 7:6 (see item 3 of this article), and John uses 666 to mark God's, Jesus' and the Christians' antagonists; that is, those who show themselves as followers of the Dragon, the Beast, and Evil (Rev. 13:17; 14:9-11; 15:2; 19:20; 20:4). Although the mention of days, times and months might not have influenced John in the creation of 666, in Rev. they do possess a negative sense because they refer to the epoch when the Beast persecuted the Christians. Ultimately, the use of seven for the Dragon and the Beast has nothing to do with the symbolism of Evil. It only deals with the repetition of the principle of seven that permeates the whole book with the aim of reducing history and its characters to an eschatological celestial cyclical perspective.

needed for a fairly careful study of the apocalyptic gender, its peculiar rules, and the respective existing literature of the period, besides the fact that he would have had to be a Jew or proficient in Hebrew at the very least.

As to the symbolical interpretation, although it does make comparisons with biblical passages containing the numbers 6, 60, 600 and 666, it ignores the fact that number 666 conceals a name perforce (see Rev. 13:17; 14:11; 15:2).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence in Revelation that John did actually rely on the passages indicated by this explanation and that he interpreted them in the same way as it did. In truth, number six, in its cardinal and ordinal forms, from the viewpoint of context, does not possess the meanings in the Bible that the symbolical interpretation uses. As shall be seen from the following, the passages Gen. 1:26-31; 1 Kgs 10:14-20, 23; Dan. 3:1, 7; 1 Sam. 17:4, 7; 2 Sam. 21:20-21; and Gen. 7:6, 11 do not possess the primary objective intention of expressing man's distinctive symbol, idolatry, enmity towards the Messiah, the recapitulation of iniquity, Evil, apostasy and imperfection. It must also be observed that number six is not exclusively used for the figure of man but also for animals sometimes, besides which it may also have either an affirmative or negative connotation.

Originally, number six was connected to the seven-day week, indicating the end of activity or of a required period, sufficient for the completion of a specific situation. Thus, a Hebrew slave shall serve for six years and on the seventh he shall be freed (Gen. 31:41; Exod. 21:2); man shall work for six days and rest on the seventh (Exod. 16:26; 20:9-11); the earth shall be sown for six years, but must then lay fallow during the seventh (Exod. 23:10-11). Whereas number seven means freedom, rest, happiness, peace and inactivity, as well as dedication to worshipping God, with justice and respect for the law, number six refers to suffering, labour, slavery, construction of one's existence to achieve freedom or full enjoyment in the next phase.

As a result of this basic meaning, number six also takes on the content of fulfilment, perfect totality, completeness, constructiveness and finishing. The influence of the principle of seven assumes the sense of reaching the maximum limit, the apex. This meaning appears to be due to the fact that six is an even number, which induces the idea of perfection on a task or action.<sup>19</sup> Such is the case of man's creation on the sixth day, which definitely completes God's divine work (Gen. 1:26-31); the fall of the wall of Jericho after six days (Josh. 6:3-5, 14-15); the total annihilation of the enemy with the symbolical launching of six arrows (2 Kgs 13:19); and the perfect measurements of God's temple in Ezekiel's view (Ezek. 40:5, 12; 41:1, 3, 5, 8).

Throughout the Bible other meanings extend from the basic meaning:

(a) Impressiveness, opulence and grandiosity: in the length of Solomon's temple (60 cubits: 1 Kgs 6:2), the quantity of his riches (666 talents and 600 shekels of gold: 1 Kgs 10:14-20, 23) and the measurements of Nebuchadnezzar's statue (60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide: Dan. 3:1, 7).

(b) Numerousness, abundance and strength in high numbers: a simple example can be found in Song 3:7 (60 warriors), an average one in Judg. 18:11 (600 men; cf. 1 Sam. 13:15; 23:13) and on the other extreme in Exod. 12:37 (600,000 men; cf. Num. 11:21 and 1 Sam. 13:5). We also find the sense of numerousness in the quantity of animals (Num. 7:88: 60 rams, 60 male goats

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<sup>18</sup> In Rev. 14:11 John wrote "the mark of its name" instead of "the number of its name". We might say that, just as the mark does, the number retains its autonomy in regard to the name. In other words, the number would indicate the person of the Beast no matter what its name was, even without gematria. Nevertheless, contrary to the mark, John demands reasoning in order to find the number, which might indicate the necessary usage of gematria with regard to the name specifically.

<sup>19</sup> Philo declares that six is the first perfect number taken from the first unit because it is the result of adding 3 + 3, or 2 + 2 + 2, and, even the multiplication of 3 x 2, which, because they are, respectively, the first odd and the first even number, within the male and female qualities, provide number six with the requirements needed to be considered the most perfect number for the creation of the world (*De Mundi Opificio* 3.13-15). In the Bible, this cipher is generally based on number three. For example: (a) 3 + 3 = 6: Exod. 37:19; 2 Kgs 13:19; (b) 3 x 2 = 6: Isa. 6:2; (c) 33 + 33 = 66: Lev. 12:4-5. It is interesting to notice that the meanings for maximum limit, perfection and numerousness sometimes come together. This may be confirmed in Gen. 46:26-27, in which the passage permits a glimpse of the preparation from 66 to 70, according to the principle of a seven-day week.

and 60 male lambs). In the Gospels, the fraction of 60 per 1 indicates abundance, great production (Matt. 13:8, 23; Mark 4:8, 20).<sup>20</sup>

(c) A warrior's huge physical strength subjected to easy defeat and ridicule: in this sense we find the Pharaoh's 600 best chariots, whose warriors drowned (Exod. 14:6-7, 27-28); Goliath's height, six cubits and a span, and the weight of his spear, 600 iron shekels, when he himself is to be defeated by David (1 Sam. 17:4, 7); and the six fingers and toes of the giant of Gath, who was also killed by David's kinsman (2 Sam. 21:20-21).<sup>21</sup>

(d) Fixation of a crucial dramatic eschatological moment: the eschatological date of the Flood in Noah's 600 years of age (Gen. 7:6, 11); and the darkness of the sixth hour of Jesus' agony (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44; John 19:14).

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties and errors, both interpretations are admissible if a few points are considered.

The first interpretation is in harmony with the historical context of the period during which John lived, where gematria was widely used among the Greeks, Jews and Romans, there being several literary testimonies within the apocalyptic genre. In truth, the Nero *redivivus* legend was fairly well known in Asia Minor (John addresses his book to this region) at the time the book was written, when pseudo-neros appeared, according to the testimony given by Tacitus and Suetonius, which would help in the identification of the heads and mountains in Rev. 13 and 17 with those of Roman emperors.<sup>22</sup> Also, the complexity in finding the number seems to agree with the author's intention, for he never clearly reveals the way to find the meaning of his allegories and symbols, thus requiring previous knowledge of the Holy Scriptures that only a Jew or a precise and finicky scholar would have. This requirement appears to be quite evident in the following phrases in Rev.13:18: *Hôde hê sophia estin; ho echôn noun psêphisatô ton arithmon tou thêriou* ("here is wisdom: that who has understanding let him calculate the number of the Beast"); that is, only someone with the capacity to understand and was prepared through *sophia* ("wisdom") would be able to indicate the letters needed to reach the number.<sup>23</sup>

The symbolical interpretation pursues a biblical basis to found its proposition upon, which is absolutely valid, for the author of Revelation is quite influenced by several biblical passages, especially by passages from the Book of Daniel. The meanings of iniquity, perdition, apostasy, idolatry and the relation to Evil are present in John's application of the number since 666 marks God's, Jesus' and the Christians' antagonists, as well as the Christian apostates. However, these meanings for 666 emanate exclusively from Revelation and not from the rest of the Bible in its original intention. On the other hand, it is possible that John may have become inspired by the passages in which David's enemies are presented as having gigantic physical strength, demonstrated through the multiplication of six by a hundred and by four, which is only apparently powerful, for they are easily defeated by the king and his heroes (see letter c above).<sup>24</sup> This is because there is a typological relationship between David's enemies and the

<sup>20</sup> The meaning of numerousness is also attributed to other numbers when they are in the tens, hundreds and thousands.

<sup>21</sup> Other numbers also assume this meaning, through the principle found in Lev. 26:8, such as: 300 (1 Chr. 11:11, 20), 400 (1 Sam. 30:17), 800 (2 Sam. 23:8) and 900 (Judg. 4:3, 13-16). In the case of 2 Macc. 8:1, 16, 24, 30, the symbolism in 6,000 prompts the idea of a miraculous victory.

<sup>22</sup> The most adopted hypothesis among the scholars is the one in which the emperors are Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian and Titus, suppressing Galba, Othon and Vitellius, who appear between Nero and Vespasian. But the most probable explanation is that the author must have applied his principle to reduce everything to seven, taking care only to emphasise the last two emperors (Vespasian and Titus), during whose reigns he must have written his book, as he wants to insinuate in Rev. 17:10.

<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to notice the fact that Nero's birth name, *Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus*, and the title "Caesar" also allow us to imagine a Greek gematria which results in number 666. Among the Twelve Caesars the name "Lucius" was attributed only to Nero. In Greek "Lucius" is *Loúkios*, whose Greek letters sum up 606. In order to reach 666 the letter xi, which is worth 60, is needed. This letter is pronounced "ks", reminding us of the Greek form of one of the abbreviations used in ancient Roman documents for "Caesar", which was "CS" (see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, 1911, entry *Abbreviation*). Therefore, it also leads us to the corresponding Greek word *Kaisar*. One of the most surprising things is that the letter xi appears three times in *hexakosioi hexêkonta hex* (666 in Greek; see Rev. 13:18): it could be referring to "Caesar", and it might be the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:17; 14:11).

<sup>24</sup> The example in Exod. 14:6-7 also seems to have this sense due to the fact that the Pharaoh's army was swallowed up by the waters of the Red Sea; in other words, his power becomes weakened when confronted with the divine power that protects the Hebrew people.

Antichrist, who is Jesus' antagonist. The relation to idolatry is also possible before Dan. 3:1, 7 and Rev. 13:14-15.<sup>25</sup>

Due to these points, the conjugation follows as a result, for John's text permits the application of both interpretations at the same time. Hypothetically, we could say that the *Nrwn Qsr* gematria would have been imagined without the letter yod on purpose so that number 666 would be reached: a cipher made deliberately in this way, with the purpose of remitting to a symbolical meaning in a perfect, vehement manner and maybe even to a typological one of the Antichrist.

Naturally, the specific symbolical content of 666 may have generated a pattern of reasoning which influenced the author in his elaboration of other passages in Revelation considering the possible typological relation of the number.

The search for other passages, especially those that lead to multiples of six, reveals that among them the list of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, found in Rev. 7:4-8, appears to subtly point towards this symbolical and typological reasoning pattern if we consider the evident substitution of Dan's tribe by Manasseh's in sixth place on the list for obvious theological reasons.

Therefore, we shall analyse the passage and highlight the internal evidence which, due to its possible typological and biblical content, may confirm not only the gematric but also the symbolical function of number 666.

### 3. The symbolism of number six in Rev. 7:4-8

#### 3.1. Analytical study of the formation of Rev. 7:4-8 and its symbolical-theological purposes

The purpose of the present study is to demonstrate that the author of Revelation had the symbolical meaning of apostasy and antagonism to the Messiah in mind for number 6 when you consider that the same meaning is found hidden in the name that occupies the sixth place on the list and that it was manipulated by John so that the symbolism would be applied to the position. Such symbolism must have been applied because of the influence of number 666 itself due to its relation to the Antichrist. Thus, with this premise in mind let us proceed with the analysis.

In chapter 7 the author of Revelation lists the Twelve Tribes of Israel according to the following order: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin. This list may be studied according to:

(a) Each of Jacob's wives' groups of sons: Judah-Reuben, Leah's sons; Gad-Asher, Leah's sons by her handmaid Zilpah (Gen. 30:9-13); Naphtali-Manasseh, respectively, Rachel's son by her handmaid Bilhah (Gen. 30:3, 7-8) and Rachel's grandson, Joseph's son (Gen. 46:27; 48:1); Simeon-Levi-Issachar-Zebulun, Leah's sons; and Joseph-Benjamin, Rachel's sons.

(b) The geographical proximity of the groups: Judah-Reuben-Gad (south, south-east and east); Asher-Naphtali (north and north-east); Manasseh, isolated in the centre without forming a group; Simeon-Levi (south and south-east); Issachar-Zebulun (centre-north and north-east); and Joseph-Benjamin (centre and south-east).

(c) The historical, political and theological content of each tribe based on biblical, noncanonical and patristic texts.

(d) A comparison with other existing lists in the Bible and early Jewish literature.

(e) A selection of lists that present the sequences that make up Rev. 7:4-8.

From the viewpoint of each of Jacob's wives' groups of sons, we notice that Leah is represented in the beginning of the first and second halves of the list, there being a separation between the groups of Judah-Reuben and Simeon-Levi-Issachar-Zebulun – tribes that descend from her legitimate sons – caused by the Gad-Asher group, born to her handmaid Zilpah, and the Naphtali-Manasseh group, which belongs to Rachel. This wife, in turn, follows Leah with the subsequent groups of each half: Naphtali, a tribe that descends from her handmaid Bilhah;

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<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding the simple contextual meaning of opulence, the passage in 1 Kgs 10:14 which contains number 666 may also refer to the idea of apostasy when confronted with the fact that Solomon adopted his women's gods (1 Kgs 11:1-13).

Manasseh, descending from Joseph's firstborn (Rachel's grandson, therefore); and Joseph-Benjamin, a group that derives from her legitimate sons. Thus, concerning the mothers, an alternating order is chosen: Leah-Rachel-Leah-Rachel, which always begins with Jacob's first wife, where in her case her handmaid appears after her (Gad-Asher after Judah-Reuben); and in Rachel's case, her respective handmaid is placed before her own appearance (Naphtali before Manasseh and Joseph-Benjamin).

From a geographical proximity point of view, the analysis helps us understand that the group positioning occurs through disconnected distant leaps: south, east, north, centre, south, north and south, giving us the impression that the list did not have any geographical principle behind its formation. However, it is important to note that Manasseh's isolation in the centre seems to indicate a special position.

In regard to the historical, political and theological content of the tribes, we have discovered that John was careful to place Judah's tribe in the first position instead of Reuben's tribe (which was originated from Leah's firstborn: Gen. 49:3-4). Notably, this was not only due to its political and religious importance since King David originated from this tribe, or because it appeared in first place in some lists in the Old Testament (Num. 2:3-31; 7:12-83; 10:14-27; 34:19-28; Josh. 21:4-7; 21:9-40; Judg. 1; 1 Chr. 4-7; 6:39-48; 6:49-66; 12:24-38), but also because it represents Jesus Christ, the lion of Judah's tribe (Rev. 5:5; Gen. 49:9), the head of the Church (Col. 1:15-18; Eph. 1:22-23). Another point ascertained is the elimination of Dan's tribe, which should have been present to form a group with Naphtali, for it descends from Dan, Bilhah's son, Rachel's handmaid. The substitution of this tribe by Manasseh's tribe is illogical since Joseph (the tribe of Manasseh's father) and Levi appear in eighth and tenth place, respectively, (see below: Joseph and Levi disappear from the list once Joseph's two sons have been entered).<sup>26</sup> An interesting observation is the preference for Manasseh over Ephraim. The reasons for the suppression, substitution and choice appear to be connected to Dan's representation in the form of a serpent, which refers to the image of the Dragon (Rev. 12:9; Gen. 49:17; 3:1, 13; Isa. 27:1; 2 Cor. 11:3; Wis. 2:24); to the fact that upon occasion Manasseh was in favour of David and God (1 Chr. 12:19-21, 31, 37-38; 2 Chr. 30:1, 10-11, 18; 31:1); and to the story of idolatry, treason and apostasy attributed to Dan and to Ephraim (Judg. 17:3-6; 18:15-17, 30-31; Amos 8:14; 1 Kgs 12:25-30; Judg. 5:17; Jer. 8:16; Hos. 4:17; 7:11; 8:9; 12:1-2; Isa. 28:1, 3; Judg. 8:1-3; 12:1-7; 2 Chr. 25:10; 30:10). In noncanonical and patristic literature we also find a negative connotation in regard to Dan.<sup>27</sup> It is important for the purpose of our study that we confirm Manasseh's appearance in sixth place, a position that might indicate the existence of a symbolical principle in the formation of the list in the sense that it marks the elimination of the Christian apostates from the midst of spiritual Israel (2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Thess. 2:11-12) by substituting Dan with Manasseh.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> C. R. Smith, in 'The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Names and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7.5-8', *JSNT* 39 (1990): 111-18, suggests the hypothesis that the substitution of Dan by Manasseh refers to the substitution of Judas Iscariot by Matthias (Acts 1:23-26).

<sup>27</sup> Among *The Twelve Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Dan's Testament (5:4-8) foretells the apostasy of this tribe. Irenaeus, in *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.2, declares that Dan's tribe was suppressed because the Antichrist was to come from it. This declaration seems to have created a tradition that is present in several patristic texts (see W. Bousset, in *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Apokalypse* [Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen: 1895]: 112-14). Contrarily, David E. Aune, in *Revelation* (Word Biblical Commentary, 52B; Dallas: Word, 1997: vol. 2, 462), observes that most of the lists of the early Jewish tribes do not exclude Dan (indeed, there are six canonical lists and six noncanonical lists without Dan). Actually, John's source of inspiration must have been the configuration found in Gen. 49:17, and, subsequently, the negative biblical story of that tribe, not the noncanonical literature or later Christian tradition.

<sup>28</sup> R. Bauckham, in 'The List of the Tribes in Revelation 7 Again', *JSNT* 42 (1991): 113, asserts that Dan was suppressed so that the list would total up twelve tribes; and David E. Aune (vol. 2, 464) believes that Joseph's tribe represents Ephraim's in virtue of a gloss in Num. 13:8, 11 (in this passage the phrase "of Joseph's tribe" refers to Manasseh, not Ephraim; something similar happens in Num. 1:10, 32; 26:28; 34:26; and Judg. 1:22; however, every case only deals with the introductory citations to identify Ephraim and Manasseh, together or separately, as Joseph's sons). These hypotheses do not take into consideration the comparative analysis of the other tribes that shows that John tends towards Gen. 35:23-26 and Gen. 46:9-27, thus clearly characterising the intrusion of Manasseh.

The comparison of Rev. 7:4-8 with other existing lists in the Bible and early Jewish Literature may help us discover the formation principles in John's list considering preliminarily the fact that no other list is like the one in Rev. 7:4-8.<sup>29</sup>

The following are the other lists, enumerated according to groups with similar list types, wherein the mothers' names are abbreviated by their initials:

1. Gen. 29:31-35; 30:1-24; 35:16-18 (E-JP Pentateuch traditions; VIII, IX-V BC): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah (L), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Issachar-Zebulun (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R). Similar ones: Demetrius the Chronographer, frag. 2:3-5, 8, 10, 17-18 (three lists; III BC); Jubilee 28:11-24; 32:3 (II BC); F. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.19.8; 1.21.3 (93 AD).

2. Gen. 35:23-26 (P Pent.; V BC): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z). Similar ones: Jubilee 33:22 (II BC); Pseudo-Philo 8:6 (71 AD); F. Josefo, *Ant.* 2.7.4 (93 AD).

3. Gen. 46:9-27 (P Pent.; V BC): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Dan-Naphtali (R-B). Similar one: Jubilee 44:11-30 (II BC).

4. Gen. 49:3-27 (J-P Pent.; IX-V BC): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Zebulun-Issachar (L), Dan (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B), Joseph-Benjamin (R).

5. Exod. 1:1-5 (P Pent.; V BC): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Benjamin (R), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z).

6. Num. 1:5-15 (P Pent.; V BC): Reuben-Simeon-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J), Benjamin (R), Dan (R-B), Asher-Gad (L-Z) and Naphtali (R-B).

7. Num. 1:20-43 (P Pent.; V BC): Reuben-Simeon (L), Gad (L-Z), Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J), Benjamin (R), Dan (R-B), Asher (L-Z) and Naphtali (R-B). Similar one, with the Manasseh-Ephraim inversion: Num. 26:5-50.

8. Num. 2:3-31 (P Pent.; V BC): Judah-Issachar-Zebulun-Reuben-Simeon (L), Gad (L-Z), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J), Benjamin (R), Dan (R-B), Asher (L-Z) and Naphtali (R-B). Similar ones: Num. 7:12-83; Num. 10:14-27.

9. Num. 13:4-15 (P Pent.; V BC): Reuben-Simeon-Judah-Issachar (L), Ephraim (R-J), Benjamin (R), Zebulun (L), Manasseh (R-J), Dan (R-B), Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B) and Gad (L-Z).

10. Num. 34:19-28 (P Pent.; V BC): Judah-Simeon (L), Benjamin (R), Dan (R-B), Manasseh-Ephraim (R-J), Zebulun-Issachar (L), Asher (L-Z) and Naphtali (R-B).

11. Deut. 27:12-13 (D; VII BC): Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Reuben (L), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Zebulun (L) and Dan-Naphtali (R-B).

12. Deut. 33:6-24 (E Pent.; VIII BC): Reuben-Judah-Levi (L), Benjamin-Joseph (R), Zebulun-Issachar (L), Gad (L-Z), Dan-Naphtali (R-B) and Asher (L-Z).

13. Josh. 13-19 (P of Josh.; V BC): Reuben (L), Gad (L-Z), Manasseh (R-J; half tribe), Judah (L), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J), Benjamin (R), Simeon-Zebulun-Issachar (L), Asher (L-Z), Naphtali-Dan (R-B).

14. Josh. 21:4-7 (P of Josh.; V BC): Judah-Simeon (L), Benjamin (R), Ephraim (R-J), Dan (R-B), Manasseh (R-J; half tribe), Issachar (L), Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B), Manasseh (R-J; half tribe), Reuben (L), Gad (L-Z) and Zebulun (L).

15. Josh. 21:9-40 (P of Josh.; V BC): Judah-Simeon (L), Benjamin (R), Ephraim (R-J), Dan (R-B), Manasseh (R-J; two half tribes), Issachar (L), Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B), Zebulun-Reuben (L) and Gad (L-Z).

16. Judg. 1 (VIII-V BC): Judah-Simeon (L), Benjamin (R), Manasseh-Ephraim (R-J), Zebulun (L), Asher (L-Z) and Naphtali-Dan (R-B).

17. 1 Chr. 2:1-2 (IV BC): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Dan (R-B), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Naphtali (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z).

18. 1 Chr. 4-7 (IV BC): Judah-Simeon-Reuben (L), Gad (L-Z), Manasseh (R-J; half tribe), Levi-Issachar (L), Benjamin (R), Naphtali (R-B), Manasseh-Ephraim (R-J) and Asher (L-Z).

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<sup>29</sup> G. Buchanan Gray, in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 4, 5208-09, and *Expositor* ser. 6, 5 (1902): 225-40, declares that the list in Rev. 7:4-8 must originally have had the following order: Judah, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Gad, Asher, Naphtali and Manasseh. The presupposition of this hypothesis may have been an intentional modification made by the final editor, or a mistake made by either the editor or copyist. According to the theory presented in this article, the most probable answer would be intentional modification.

19. 1 Chr. 6:39-48 (IV BC): Judah (L), Benjamin (R), Manasseh (R-J; half tribe), Issachar (L), Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B), Manasseh (R-J; half tribe), Reuben (L), Gad (L-Z) and Zebulun (L).

20. 1 Chr. 6:49-66 (IV BC): Judah-Simeon (L), Benjamin (R), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J; Manasseh: two half tribes), Issachar (L), Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B), Zebulun-Reuben (L) and Gad (L-Z).

21. 1 Chr. 12:24-38 (IV BC): Judah-Simeon-Levi (L), Benjamin (R), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J; Manasseh: half tribe), Issachar-Zebulun (L), Naphtali-Dan (R-B), Asher (L-Z), Reuben (L), Gad (L-Z) and Manasseh (R-J; half tribe).

22. 1 Chr. 27:16-22 (IV BC): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Naphtali (R-B), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J; Manasseh: two half tribes), Benjamin (R) and Dan (R-B).

23. Ezek. 48:1-29 (VI BC): Dan (R-B), Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B), Manasseh-Ephraim (R-J), Reuben-Judah (L), Benjamin (R), Simeon-Issachar-Zebulun (L) and Gad (L-Z).

24. Ezek. 48:30-35 (VI BC): Reuben-Judah-Levi (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Dan (R-B), Simeon-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Gad-Asher (L-Z) and Naphtali (R-B).

25. The Twelve Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (II BC-I AD): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Joseph-Benjamin (R). Similar ones: Jubilee 34:20 (II BC); Pseudo-Philo 26:10-11 (71 BC).

26. Testament of Judah 25:1-2 (II BC): Levi-Judah-Simeon-Reuben-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z).

27. Jubilee 38:5-8 (II BC): Judah (L), Naphtali (R-B), Gad (L-Z), Levi (L), Dan (R-B), Reuben-Issachar-Zebulun-Simeon (L), Benjamin (R) and Henoc (son of Reuben).

28. 11QTemple, col. 24.10-16 (II BC): Judah (L), Benjamin (R), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J), Reuben-Simeon-Issachar-Zebulun (L) and Gad-Asher (Z).

29. 11QTemple, col. 39.12-13 (II BC): Simeon-Levi-Judah-Reuben (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Issachar-Zebulun (L), Gad (L-Z), Dan-Naphtali (R-B) and Asher (L-Z).

30. 11QTemple, col. 39.14-16; 40.15; 41 (II BC): Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Gad (L-Z), Dan-Naphtali (R-B) and Asher (L-Z).

31. 11QTemple, col. 44 (II BC): Simeon-Judah-Levi-Reuben (L), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J), Benjamin (R) and Issachar (L).

32. 4Q554, frag. 1, cols. 1-2 (I AD): Simeon-Levi-Judah (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R), Reuben-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Gad (L-Z), Dan (R-B), Asher (L-Z) and Naphtali (R-B).

33. Philo, *De Somniis* 2.5.34-40 (30 AD): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Dan (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Naphtali (R-B) and Benjamin (R).

34. Pseudo-Philo 8:11-14 (71 AD): Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Judah-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Gad (L-Z), Ephraim-Manasseh (R-J) and Benjamin (R).

35. Pseudo-Philo 10:3 (71 AD): Reuben-Issachar-Zebulun-Simeon (L), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Levi-Judah (L), Joseph-Benjamin (R).

36. Pseudo-Philo 25:4 (71 AD): Judah-Reuben-Simeon-Levi-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Manasseh-Ephraim (R-J) and Benjamin (R).

37. Pseudo-Philo 25:9-13 (71 AD): Reuben-Levi-Issachar-Zebulun (L), Dan-Naphtali (R-B), Gad-Asher (L-Z), Manasseh-Ephraim (R-J) and Benjamin (R).

The basic models of the lists are types 1, 2 and 3, which undergo changes instigated by territorial, geographical, political, military, theological and editorial motives. This observation denotes the importance that the Book of Genesis has upon the factor of influence. The list in Rev. 7:4-8 also obeys the same principles as these models, such as the positioning of Leah in first and Rachel in second place, but it differs in ordering the handmaids' tribes in a respective order (Leah-Zilpah, Rachel-Bilhah, instead of Rachel-Bilhah, Leah-Zilpah) and by placing them in the first half. This in turn gives rise to the suspicion that there is a specific reason for doing so.

The statistical comparison ascertains that the types of list are opposed to Rev. 7:4-8 in the following details:

(a) Judah's tribe appears in the beginning with Reuben's tribe, though preceding it in only one list (Pseudo-Philo 25:4).

(b) Gad, Asher, Dan and Naphtali appear far more frequently in the second half, according to the following number of occurrences: Gad twenty-six times, Asher thirty times, Dan twenty-four times and Naphtali thirty times; in the first half isolated appearances prevail: Gad five times, Asher once, Dan four times and Naphtali once, against the groups Dan-Naphtali (twice), Gad-Asher (once), Dan-Asher-Naphtali (once) and Naphtali-Gad-Dan (once).

(c) The Dan-Naphtali order appears in the great majority of lists instead of the Naphtali-Dan order (this one only appears in three types of list: Josh. 13-19; Judg. 1; 1 Chr. 12:24-38).

(d) The most frequent is the Gad-Asher collocation after Dan-Naphtali (eight types against three; besides the fact that both groups appear intercalated in seven types and are also interchanged in another seven types).

(e) Dan comes before Naphtali and Gad-Asher in seventeen types of list.

(f) Dan appears only once in sixth place (Ezek. 48:30-35).

(g) As regards Manasseh's tribe, it is necessary to state that in the twenty times it appears, sixteen of those times it occurs near Ephraim's, where in twelve times against eight it is in the second half; when both appear, Joseph's tribe is missing; and Manasseh's tribe always takes the place of Levi's (which ends up by being suppressed in some lists because it did not possess a territory) or Joseph's, naturally, never Dan's.

(h) The other tribes appear frequently in the first half in practically thirty types of list, though the appearance is only partial at times.

Such details end up demonstrating that John does not follow any logical reasoning when confronted with the internal principles of the other lists, a fact which makes Rev. 7:4-8 quite unique.

Finally, we should also study Rev. 7:4-8 from the viewpoint of the sequencing similarities in the other lists to discover if John tends towards any list in particular. Therefore, let us select the lists:

(a) Judah-Reuben in the beginning: Pseudo-Philo 25:4; inverted Reuben-Judah in Deut. 33:6-24 and Ezek. 48:30-35.

(b) Gad-Asher in the first half: to be found only in Pseudo-Philo 10:3.

(c) Gad-Asher-Naphtali: occurs only in the second half: Gen. 49:3-27; *De Somniis* 2.5.34-40; Num. 1:5-15 (with the inversion of Asher-Gad-Naphtali); and Ezek. 48:30-35.

(d) Asher-Naphtali-Manasseh in the first half: only in Ezek. 48:1-29; the alternative Asher-Naphtali-Dan: only appears in the second half in Josh. 13-19 and Judg. 1.

(e) Manasseh in sixth place: Josh. 13-19 (half tribe); 21:4-7; 21:9-40 (half tribe); 1 Chr. 12:24-38 (half tribe); and 11QTemple, col. 44.

(f) Simeon-Levi-Issachar-Zebulun: occurs only in the first half: Gen. 46:9-27 (Judah between Levi and Issachar).

(g) Simeon-Levi-Issachar-Zebulun-Joseph-Benjamin: only appears in the first half: Gen. 35:23-26 (Judah between Levi and Issachar).

The letter g sequence above shows that Gen. 35:23-26 serves as the basic list formation, for it contains the same original sequence, though with Reuben before and Judah between Levi and Issachar (that John includes Levi's tribe in his list is perceived, which confirms his tendency towards Gen. 35:23-26, even when he inserts Manasseh's tribe, which only appears in the other lists when Levi's does not). The displacement of Judah to before Reuben, generated for theological reasons, forms the sequence in Rev. 7:4-8, though the Gad-Asher-Naphtali-Manasseh nucleus placed between Reuben and Simeon causes its fragmentation. This nucleus does not exist in any other list, it can only be found in fragments in Gad-Asher, Gad-Asher-Naphtali and Asher-Naphtali-Manasseh, or Asher-Naphtali-Dan.

The occurrence of Gad-Asher and Asher-Naphtali-Manasseh in only the first half happens in two lists, whereas Gad-Asher-Naphtali and the alternative Asher-Naphtali-Dan always appear in the second half, a fact which denotes a lack of logic in Rev. 7:4-8 when confronted with most of the lists. The statistical possibility of placing Manasseh after Naphtali is practically nil, for this sequence only appears in Ezek. 48:1-29. The placement of Manasseh in sixth place in most of the above mentioned lists should not be taken into consideration because it is an isolated fact that does not depend on the sequences.

What we may deduce from the Gad-Asher-Naphtali-Manasseh sequence is that its fragmentation indicates that John did not take into account the pattern in any of the lists coinciding with it because it would have proven to be a highly complex composition task, a search through such widely spaced lists. Therefore, the sequence is particular to Rev. 7:4-8.

We may suppose that the beginning of Rev. 7:4-8 followed some geographical inspiration taken from the Reuben-Gad sequence, as seen in Josh. 13-19, thus motivating the placement of groups Gad-Asher and Naphtali-Manasseh in the beginning. However, as we have already seen, geographical inspiration should be discarded.

From all of this, we may conclude that Rev. 7:4-8 tends towards Gen. 35:23-26, even though Gen. 46:9-27 shows up in a subsidiary manner due to the adoption of the respective order Leah-Zilpah, Rachel-Bilhah. Thus, by using such model lists, the composition was made simpler and more accessible to John during his search and order process. Apparently, the modification he made when he placed the handmaids' groups between Reuben and Simeon must have had the purpose of making the list conform in such a way as to permit the appearance of Manasseh in sixth place in substitution of Dan. If this was really what happened, the fact that there are theological principles behind the formation of Rev. 7:4-8 may be confirmed, marked by two displacements: Judah's and the handmaids' groups; and, more significantly, the similarity of Rev. 7:4-8 to the two lists quoted demonstrates that Manasseh's tribe is the true intruder and that it should never have been placed there: its placement was a deliberate choice made by John.<sup>30</sup>

The discovery of this illogical displacement of the Gad-Asher and Dan-Naphtali groups to the first half of the list indicates that John wanted to put the handmaids' groups together. This would have happened because there would have been no sense in displacing Dan's tribe without displacing the handmaids' groups to which it belonged, for it was a case of obvious ordination (as may be seen in Gen. 35:23-26). Thus, because of this observation and the preference for including Levi and Joseph, we realise that John had no intention of substituting any other tribe but Dan's. Naturally, when John placed the handmaids' groups between Reuben and Simeon, he did not want to place Manasseh before Naphtali, which was Dan's original position in Gen. 46:9-27, and the most preferred placement in most lists, but after Naphtali, in the sixth position, entirely disrupting logic. The intention behind the modification would be to bring up the Beast with number six, doubtlessly because of Rev. 13:18, and to point out its followers, the apostates, who were banished from the midst of spiritual Israel (cf. Rev. 14:3, 9-11; 15:2-4; 19:19-20; 20:4). This elimination was made possible through the symbolical substitution of Dan – the embodiment of the apostate – by Manasseh.

To visualise that theory and the manipulation between the lists of Gen. 35:23-26 and Rev. 7:4-8, see graphic 1 at the end of this text.

### *3.2 Objections to symbolism of Rev. 7: 4-8*

Three objections may counter the theory presented in this article.

The first objection is that Manasseh ended up in sixth place merely as a consequence of John's desire to place the three handmaids' tribes near each other (Gad-Asher-Naphtali). However, this possibility is dispelled when confronted with the following determining factors: the preference for placing the handmaids' groups in the first half of the list, causing the illogical fragmentation of Leah's group; the choice of the respective order Leah-Zilpah, Rachel-Bilhah, propitiating the placement of Naphtali-Manasseh in fifth and sixth place; the negative meaning that 666 and the serpent figure attribute to number six and Dan's tribe, respectively; and the substitution itself of Dan by Manasseh, which creates a relation of number 666 to apostasy and the Antichrist. Moreover, if it had not been his intention to mark the sixth place, John could have placed the handmaids' tribes at the end of the list leaving Manasseh in twelfth place (see n.

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<sup>30</sup> The list in Rev. 7:4-8 may have been a reproduction of some traditional list adopted by John's community. In any case, this tradition would also have obeyed the pattern in Gen. 35:23-26 and Gen. 46:9-27, and it would have reflected the desire to exclude and substitute Dan's tribe, marking its position with number six.

29), or in any other position; nor is it possible to say that in Rev. 7:4-8 the order is random considering the fact that the author's general inspiration from the Old Testament permits one to deduce the existence of a previous veterotestamentary list.<sup>31</sup>

The second objection is that there could not have been a symbolical numerical intention since, if this were so, all the numbers on the list would have had to be dubbed with meaning according to the typology of each tribe. It is obvious that the other tribes do not attribute any specific meaning to their respective numbers. Nevertheless, throughout the text in Revelation it is possible to observe the author's efforts to emphasise mainly two images: the lion of Judah and the Beast. Thus, the other tribes were of no importance from a symbolical point of view. The displacement of both Judah's tribe and the handmaids' groups indicates which tribes were special and needed to be pointed out according to the determinant principles in Rev. 5:1-5; 2:8; and 13:18.

Finally, the third objection is that the symbolical intention in Rev. 7:6 could not possibly exist, for it is not immediately perceptible to the reader. However, we should remember that the main characteristic of the apocalyptic genre is to make the comprehension of its message more difficult by using codes that cannot be understood immediately. Even today many passages in Revelation have yet to be explained and throughout the text there are imperceptible things, such as, for example, the existence of blessedness spread seven times through out it (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Furthermore, the Rev. 13:18 passage itself leaves no doubt to the fact that John did not want to put things clearly.

#### 4. Comparison of Rev. 7:4-8 to the lists of the Apostles

Since John relates the Tribes of Israel to the Twelve Apostles of Jesus (Rev. 21:12, 14), it is possible that he had subtly intended to refer to the nominal list of the Apostles and their story in Rev. 7:4-8.

In the New Testament, there are four lists of the Apostles found in Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; and Acts 1:13. The Fourth Gospel gives us only dispersed quotations (John 1:35-51; 13:26; 14:5, 8; 21:2). The latter quotes nominally Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, Judas Iscariot and Thomas, and possibly six other who were not named; that is, the Beloved Disciple, Zebedee's sons and three disciples who are unknown (John 1:40; 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:2, 7, 20). In John 14:22, the author of the Fourth Gospel mentions another one named Judas, who must be one among the three unknown, because the disciples are called "The Twelve" by him (see John 20:24).

Among the three foremost Gospels, called *synoptics* (for they can be read almost at the same time), there are variations:

(a) Matthew places Matthew himself in eighth place, while Luke and Mark place him in seventh.

(b) Luke moves Simon to the tenth place, while Matthew and Mark place him in eleventh.

(c) Mark places Andrews in fourth place intercalating Peter and Andrew (who is Peter's brother) with the brothers James and John, while Matthew and Luke place the brothers together, being that Andrew comes out in second place after Peter.

(d) Luke changes Thaddaeus's name for Judas, who is James's brother, son of Alphaeus.

John's Gospel named Nathanael, who is not in the synoptical lists. Christian tradition identified him with Bartholomew.

In Acts, the list of the Apostles is quite different from the other lists: John moves to the second place, between Peter and James; Thomas moves to the sixth, between Philip and Bartholomew; and Simon moves to the tenth, between Judas (Thaddaeus) and James.

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<sup>31</sup> Even so, uniting the handmaids' sons (Gad-Asher-Naphtali) may appear to have been done to conveniently permit the placement of Manasseh in sixth place. That is to say, the inversion of Dan-Naphtali for Naphtali-Dan or Naphtali-Manasseh with the handmaids' group may have been conceived from John's observation that by uniting Naphtali to the Gad-Asher tribes he would be forwarding his intention of placing Manasseh in sixth place.

On the lists of the synoptical Gospels, Judas Iscariot, the traitor, always appears in twelfth place. Later on, he was substituted by Mathias, who had to be competing with Joseph Barsabas (Acts 1:23-26). This fact alone allows us to perceive a possible connection with the list of Revelation: the author substitutes Messiah's adversary – Dan, the serpent, or Judas Iscariot, who was inspired by the Devil (see John 13:27) – by one who is in his favour: Manasseh or Mathias. Just like Manasseh competes with Ephraim, Mathias competes with Joseph Barsabas.

In order for us to try to connect Rev. 7:4-8 with the list of the Apostles so that the hidden Dan is parallel to Judas Iscariot, we must be based on the list that is in Gen. 35:23-26, making a list of the tribes in groups, starting with the lawful wives. Likewise, to make such a comparison, the list of the Apostles must be harmonised; that is, put on by checking the most stable positions among the lists of the New Testament. So, we will find the dispositions that are in graphic 2 at the end of this text (see notes 26 and 29 as well).

In said comparison between the two lists, we see that John places Gad and Asher before Naphtali, and Dan or Manasseh after Naphtali. Considering the list of the Apostles, it seems that such modifications were intentional so that Dan or Manasseh were directed towards Judas Iscariot or Mathias. After these changes, John would have displaced the handmaids' group to after Reuben, leaving Dan or Manasseh, and as a consequence Judas Iscariot and Mathias, in sixth place, and so symbolising them with number 666.

There are other coincidences: Peter, the leader of the Twelve Apostles, is in first place, like Judah, the leader of the Twelve Tribes; there are both four principal Leah's sons and four principal apostles; James, Alphaeus's son, and Thaddaeus are brothers, like Gad and Asher; apostles James and John were called "Boanerges" or "Sons of Thunder", perhaps because of their impetuous nature (see Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54), while Simon and Levi had a violent nature in Gen. 49:5-7. These coincidences confirm a possible parallelism between the lists.

### Conclusion

The procedure of reviewing the two main interpretations of number 666 has made it possible to verify that the symbolical meaning of the cipher can only have been taken from the text of Revelation itself, notwithstanding the fact that the author might have received typological influence from passages in the Old Testament such as in 1 Sam. 17:4, 7; and 2 Sam. 21:20-21.

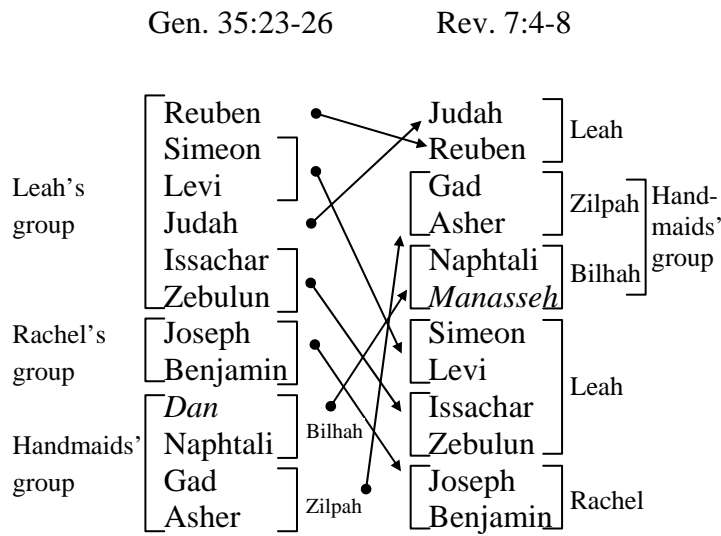
Nevertheless, one can not deny the possible use of gematria on John's part considering the fact that 666 most certainly represents a name resulting from a mathematical operation even though the author does not reveal the equation.

Thus, the conjugation of both interpretations appears to be convenient.

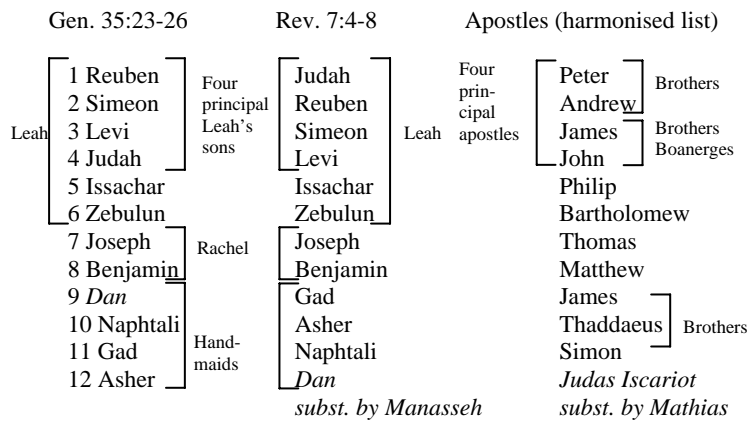
The author's symbolical and typological reasoning pattern about 666 may be confirmed by analysing the formation of the list of the Twelve Tribes of Israel that is found in Rev. 7:4-8. The disposition permits one to detect manipulation with the intention to force the appearance of Manasseh's tribe in sixth place, indicating by doing so that Dan's tribe had been placed there and that it had been marked primitively with number six due to its relation to apostasy and the Antichrist.

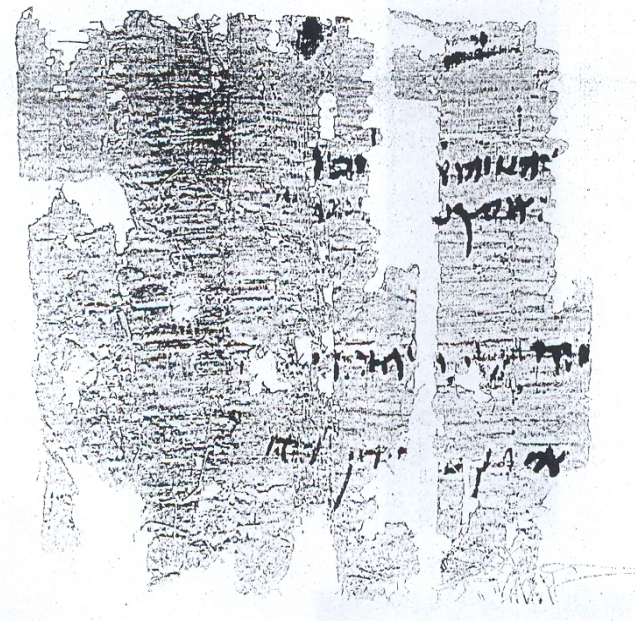
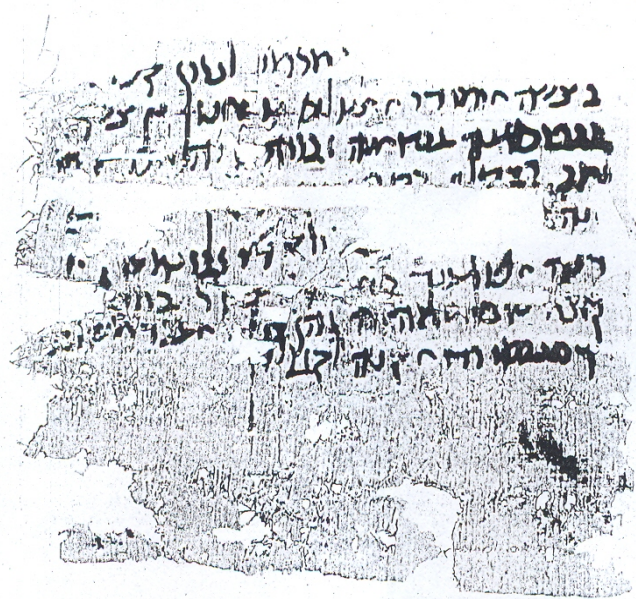
Finally, the possible connection of the lists of the Twelve Tribes of Israel with the list of the Twelve Apostles and their story (substitution of Judas Iscariot by Mathias, among other coincidences), leads us to conclude that the author of Revelation would also be doing a symbolical and typological parallel between the Old and New Testaments. This closes his chain of hidden, apocalyptic and prophetic meanings, completely included and summarised in number 666.

Graphic 1



Graphic 2





Front and back of the Wadi Murabba'at document containing NRW QSR ("Nero Caesar") at the end of the first line. It was found in 1951.

First line reconstitution (to be read from right to left)

R S Q NWRN L Y T R T

