

The manager of the Christian discount book store in Phoenix had a bit of trouble in selling Hal Lindsey's latest book - THE MARK OF THE BEAST. Several customers had been a little taken aback and a couple have nearly refused to take the book. The reason: the price of the book, plus tax, comes to \$6.66.

The fear of this number is evident in the news. For example, one woman, who in her misguided passion and horror successfully fought the United States government to have her social security number which had 666 in it changed to another number.

Theologians have assigned this number to many men of history. It has been identified with about every known sinister character in history, from Nero to Saddam. A method of solving the identity of the number 666 was used by later Jews and early Christians known as gematria. *"the use of letters of a word so as by means of their combined numerical value to express a name or a witty association of ideas"* (ISBE IV, 2162). One example of gematria is graffiti from the walls of ancient Pompeii on which some lover wrote, *"I love her whose number is 545."* Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.) introduced the view that the first Roman ruler was named Latinus (spelled Lateinos in Greek). Using the Greek evaluation method, L = 30, A = 1, T = 300, E = 5, I = 10, N = 50, O = 70, S = 200. That is 666. It has been pointed out that *"the recent discovery of an Aramaic illustration of Nero Caesar, spelled so as to equal 666 at Qumram gives credence to this as a solution"* (J.W. Roberts, The Revelation to John, 116). Yet, in the Greek Nero Caesar is "Neron Kaisar" thus it would be 1005 and not 666. One theory reduces "Nero Caesar" to the Hebrew consonant equivalent "nron Ksr." The Hebrew

numerical equivalent is N = 50, R = 200, O = 6, N = 50, K = 100, S = 60, R + 200. The total is 666. It is doubtful that John would have referred to Hebrew numbers when writing in the Greek language to a Greek audience.

Still others argue for other Roman emperors, such as Caligula or Domitian. *"If the number is to be applied to one man, it appears that Domitian, monster of sin, cruelty and degradation fulfilled that role"* (Summers, 177).

Later Protestants assigned it to the Pope of Rome and Catholics assigned it to Martin Luther, John Calvin, etc. The most popular choice of modern times has been Hitler. From a tract entitled THE BEAST, THE FALSE PROPHET, AND HITLER, published in 1941, we find this serious suggestion: *"Hitler himself is spelled out in the puzzle given in Rev. 16:18. This puzzle, when worked out, will indicate a certain man. We have only three numerals, 666, but through them we must find the man's name. So we must numeralize the alphabet. To do this we will let 100 stand for 'A'. It must be three figures to stand for the three digits 666. A - 100; B - 101; C - 102; ..."*

In the past few decades till the present, Spiro Agnew, Henry Kissinger, Saddam, Ronald Wilson Reagan (whose three names have six letters each) and even the purple dinosaur Barney have fallen victim to 666 phobia. Others have denied that this number refers to a specific man but to modern devices, such as, social security numbers, bank numbers, credit card numbers, population control numbers, and the European Common Market.

Whatever 666 means it must have significance for original readers of Revelation. The number 666 as given in Revelation 13:18 has not, does not and cannot refer to the coming of a man or beast in the decade in which we live or in any future time. John wrote the visions of Revelation and proclaimed that they *"must shortly come to pass"* and *"the time is at hand"* (Rev. 1:1-3; 22:6,10). To place the meaning of Revelation in modern times is to rob

the book of any real meaning or comfort to those to whom it was written, and it is to call the Son of God a liar. What consolation would it have for a young Christian in a Roman prison having watched friends and parents and grandparents torn apart by beasts to know that Hitler would attack Poland 1800 years in the future? Why the symbolic, coded, dark sayings to keep the info from falling into the hands of the enemy? If John was talking about ICBM's, tanks, Arabs, Saddam, Hitler, etc. why use symbols?

NO FORMULA TO DECIPHER 666

Caird has well said, *"Though it is easy enough to turn a name into a number, it is not so simple to proceed in the opposite direction"* (p. 174). First, if the proper name by itself will not yield a name add a title; secondly, if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin and English, and do not be too particular about the spelling.

"The last clause (of Revelation 13:18) has no article ... Some writers have understood the words to mean, 'the number refers to an individual man;' but the absence of the article militates against the view" (Pulpit, 336). John omits the definite article before "man," thereby indicating that he has no particular individual in mind.

666 IS A FIGURATIVE SYMBOL

The assigning of a concept or meaning to a specific number is common in the Bible. This is especially apparent in the book of Revelation. The number "seven" expresses the idea of perfection or completeness: the seven churches, seven horns, seven eyes, seven spirits, and so forth. Seven is the divine perfect number.

In contrast, the number six is short of perfection, it is the number of man, it is the number of imperfection or failure. The Jews regarded the number six as an omen of doom or failure. In the oriental numerology the number

"6" indicated doom when by itself. It is comparable to our use of the number "13."

Thus, the number "666" denoted greater evil; it was evil intensified. Tripled it would be intensified evil. Several interpreters have noted that the cryptic number "888" was used in the Sibylline oracles (1:324) as a symbol for Jesus. He goes as far beyond the perfect "777". As a symbol the number "666" is evil raised to its highest power.

It seems more in harmony with the context to conclude that human devices and systems which oppose Christ and His cause are symbolized by the cryptogram 666, rather than some specific man. In chapter 13, John saw two beasts (one coming up out of the sea (1); and the other coming up out of the earth (11); both are allies of Satan. It is now concluded that the number of the beast, six-six-six, stands for the complete and total failure of all human systems and efforts antagonistic to God and His Christ - all are doomed to ultimate and complete defeat. In contrast those who serve God will succeed (Rev. 14:1).

Interestingly, the first six Roman numerals add up to 666 (I = 1, V = 5; X = 10; L = 50; C = 100, and D = 500).

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

The number 666 is associated with the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-18). The word "mark" was a technical term in the Greek language for the imperial stamp on commercial documents. When emperor worship was demanded by law a man was required to secure a certificate stating that he had offered sacrifice to the gods or to the emperor. Without this certificate he could not buy or sell in the marketplace. A pinch of incense cast on the altar to Caesar did not mean much. After all the early Christians knew the Caesar was not God. Yet John is pointing out that to even participate while knowing Caesar was not God was wrong, that it was a compromise and a "selling out" of the true God. The "mark of the beast" was

nothing more than license to engage in the benefits of Roman citizenship. The beast provided that no one should be able to buy or sell without the mark. The branding "mark" of the wicked is no more literal than the branding of the righteous (2 Tim. 2:19). Whatever the mark of the beast was, it has passed (1 Tim. 2:23).

Then again maybe this is all wrong and 666 really stands for the billionaire Bill Gates III whose name when converted to ASCII values from the computer adds up to 666. Not to mention the computer program that made him so wealthy, Windows 95, also adds up to 666 when assigned ASCII values. A mere coincidence?

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Worship Service.....10:30 am

Worship Service.....5:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study.....7:30 pm

666

by Daniel R. Vess