

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About...

Meaning of the Number 666

This number is taken from Revelation 13:18, "for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six." In order to understand the meaning of this number we must know what the apostle John wrote in Revelation 1:1, "God gave Him [Jesus] to show to His bond-servants, the things which must SOON take place; and He sent and COMMUNICATED it by His angel to His bond-servant John." [NASB] The Greek word for "soon" in this verse is the same Greek word that Paul used in 2 Timothy 4:9, "Make every effort to come to me SOON;... When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:9, 13). The Greek word for "communicated it" means to teach in symbols or symbolic language. If one were to take the complete book of Revelation and interpret it literally, he would be taking "away from the words of the book of this prophecy" (Rev. 22:19).

To understand the meaning of the number 666 you would need to understand the symbolism of other numbers in the book. The number 3 symbolizes divine or Spiritual perfection (Rev. 21:13). The number 4 symbolizes the physical world. "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth" (Rev. 7:1). The number 7 represents Spiritual fullness, abundance, and completion. Some examples from scripture which include this number are: after God's creation He rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). The prophet Elisha told Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan River before he would be healed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:10, 14). Jesus fed the 4,000 with seven loaves and a few small fish (Matt. 15:34-36). The book of Revelation uses the number 7 frequently. Altogether the Bible uses the number seven 433 times, so it is a very significant number. The number 12 or multiples of it signify the people of God (Rev. 7:4, 21:12, 14, 21). Lastly, the number 6 symbolizes falling short of 7, or Spiritual completeness, and is the number of a "man" (Gen. 1:26, 31; Rev. 13:18).

"And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore" (Rev. 13:1). Who is the dragon? Revelation 12:9 defines him: "Then the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan." Who is the first beast? "Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns... and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names"..."and the dragon gave him [the beast] his power and his throne and great authority" (Rev. 13:1-2). The sea in this verse symbolizes nations and peoples (Isa. 17:12-13). The prophet Daniel defines "beasts" as kingdoms of men (Daniel 7:17, 23-24). In these verses Daniel was prophesying of the fourth kingdom the Roman Empire.

Who was the second beast? The apostle John saw "another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it [unbelievers] to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed" (Rev. 13:11-12). At the writing of this book Caesar Nero already had a "fatal wound" with his own sword. The persecution of Christians was "healed" under Caesar Domitian [81-96 A.D.] and "has come to life" (Rev. 13:14). The first and second beast get their power from the Dragon (Rev. 12:3). The two horns symbolize power that is "like a lamb," not THE Lamb, who is Christ. This second earthly beast symbolizes false worship of Caesar and his idols which was mandatory for all citizens of the Roman Empire.

What is the mark of the beast? Christians had to prove their worship of Caesar by signing a certificate and if they refused they were either killed or were not allowed to buy or sell goods. Jesus commended the church at Smyrna because they likely did not participate in this false worship of Caesar and had great tribulation (Rev. 2:8-10). Without this certificate of proof [considered a mark] no one could buy or sell, marry, or participate in government programs within the Roman Empire.

The fear of 666 causes many scriptural controversies when "religious" people take the position that this number references a single person who is to come in the future. This is not the case. When the inspired word says it is the "number of a man," it simply means the number represents something that is "of man" as opposed to being "of God." The dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast in Revelation chapter 13 represent three evil entities that fall short of seven or Spiritual completeness. The three sixes or 666 simply signifies that these three are all evil. Therefore, the number 666 has nothing to do with microchips, bar codes, Russia, China, nuclear weapons, International Monetary Fund, or countless other false teachings that just make for a good movie thriller!

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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