An Exegetical Study On – Revelation 13:18

How to Study the Bible: Basics of Exegesis

Scripture Reference:

Revelation 13:18 (KJV):
“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

Study Outline

1. **Introduction**
    - Purpose of the Study
    - Importance of Exegesis

2. **Reading the Text**
    - Primary Verse: Revelation 13:18 (KJV)
    - Related Verses:
        - Revelation 13:16-17 (KJV): “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”
        - Revelation 14:9-10 (KJV): “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud

voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb."

3. **Contextual Analysis**
    - **Immediate Context:** Revelation 13:1-18 discusses the rise of the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, representing oppressive powers and false prophets.
    - **Broader Context:** Revelation as a whole is a prophetic and apocalyptic book written by John to the seven churches in Asia Minor, addressing their struggles and encouraging faithfulness amidst persecution.
    - **Historical Context:**
        - **First Century AD:** The Roman Empire's dominance and persecution of Christians.
        - **Nero's Reign:** Notorious for his cruelty towards Christians, potentially referenced symbolically as the beast.
        - **Jewish-Roman War:** The conflict that culminated in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD.

4. **Literary Analysis**
    - **Genre:** Apocalyptic literature, filled with symbolic and visionary imagery.

- **Structure:** Revelation 13 is structured as a vision of two beasts, emphasizing the trials believers will face.
- **Symbolism:** The beast represents oppressive political power, demanding worship and loyalty that belongs to God alone.

5. **Theological Themes**
   - **Wisdom and Discernment:** The verse emphasizes the need for spiritual insight to understand the significance of the number of the beast.
   - **Symbolic Numerology:** The number 666 as the number of a man, often interpreted through gematria, representing human imperfection and opposition to God.
   - **Faithfulness:** Encourages believers to seek wisdom and remain steadfast, recognizing the deeper spiritual realities behind political and social powers.

6. **Exegesis of Key Terms and Phrases**
   - **"Here is wisdom":** Indicates a call to deep understanding and discernment.
   - **"Let him that hath understanding count the number":** Suggests the need for spiritual insight to interpret the number correctly.
   - **"The number of the beast":** Symbolic of oppressive political power and false worship.
   - **"It is the number of a man":** Often interpreted to represent human imperfection or a specific historical figure through gematria.
   - **"Six hundred threescore and six":** (666) A number often associated with imperfection and evil in biblical numerology.

7. **Language Component**

- **Original Greek Text:**
  - “Ὧδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν. Ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου· ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ χξς΄.”
  - Key Words:
    - “σοφία” (sophia) – “wisdom”
    - “νοῦν” (noun) – “understanding”
    - “ψηφισάτω” (psēphisatō) – “count”
    - “ἀριθμὸν” (arithmon) – “number”
    - “θηρίου” (thēriou) – “beast”
    - “χξς΄” (chi xi stigma) – “666”

8. **Interlinear Component**
   - Greek Text: “χξς΄”
   - Transliteration: “chi xi stigma”
   - Translation: “Six hundred threescore and six”
     - “χ” (chi) = 600
     - “ξ” (xi) = 60
     - “ς” (stigma) = 6

9. **Cross-References and Related Texts**
   - **Old Testament:**
     - Daniel 7:7-8 (KJV): Vision of the fourth beast.
   - **New Testament:**
     - Matthew 24:24 (KJV): False Christs and false prophets.
     - 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 (KJV): The man of sin and son of perdition.
     - 1 John 2:18 (KJV): The antichrist.

10. **Historical and Cultural Insights**

    - **Gematria:** A method of interpreting Hebrew or Greek letters as numbers. The name “Nero Caesar” in Hebrew (□□□ □□□□) calculates to 666, while an alternate spelling without the final Nun (□□□ □□□) calculates to 616.
    - **Emperor Worship:** In the Roman Empire, emperors were often deified and worshiped, creating a conflict for early Christians who recognized only one true God.
    - **Persecution:** Christians faced intense persecution, making Revelation’s encouragement to remain faithful highly relevant.

11. **Application for Today**
    - **Spiritual Vigilance:** Encourages believers to be discerning about whom they worship and follow.
    - **Faith in Adversity:** Strengthens the resolve of modern Christians facing persecution or trials.
    - **Hope in Christ’s Victory:** Assures believers of their secure future in Christ, whose sacrificial death and resurrection are central to their faith.

12. **Summary and Conclusion**
    - Recap of Key Points
    - The enduring relevance of Revelation 13:18 for personal faith and community resilience.

Conclusion

Revelation 13:18 serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing spiritual battle between allegiance to worldly powers and faithfulness to Christ. This exegetical study highlights the

historical context, literary structure, language components, and theological depth of the verse, encouraging believers to seek wisdom and remain steadfast in their faith. Through understanding the text, Christians can draw strength and insight for their spiritual journey.

Part 2

Understanding the Symbolism of 666 in Revelation and Historical Context

The Date of Writing of Revelation

Scripture Reference:
Revelation 1:9 (KJV): “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Discussion:
The date of the writing of Revelation is debated among scholars, with two primary views:

- **Early Date (Before 70 AD):** Some argue that Revelation was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Evidence for this includes internal references to the Temple (Revelation 11:1-2), suggesting it was still standing.
- **Late Date (Around 90 AD):** The more traditional view, supported by early church fathers like Irenaeus, places the writing during the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). This view is based on external historical

references.

Scripture Reference:
Revelation 13:18 (KJV): “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

Gematria and Nero

Discussion:

- **Gematria:** An ancient practice assigning numerical values to letters. In Hebrew, the name “Neron Caesar” (□□□□ □□□) translates to 666:

This suggests that John encoded Nero’s name using Gematria, providing a hidden critique understandable to early Christians while avoiding Roman censorship.

Understanding the Number of the Beast: 666 and 616

Scriptural Context

Revelation 13:18 (KJV): “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

Manuscript Variations

The number of the Beast in Revelation has variations in ancient manuscripts:

- **666:** Found in the majority of manuscripts, including Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus.
- **616:** Found in some early manuscripts, such as Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus and Papyrus 115 (P115).

Explanation of Both Numbers

The variations of 666 and 616 can both be explained through the use of gematria applied to the name Nero Caesar.

Gematria for Nero Caesar

- **Hebrew Spelling:**
  - "Neron Caesar" (□□□ □□□□):
    - □ (N) = 50
    - □ (R) = 200
    - □ (O) = 6
    - □ (N) = 50
    - □ (Q) = 100
    - □ (S) = 60
    - □ (R) = 200
    - **Total** = 666

- **Alternate Spelling:**
  - "Nero Caesar" (□□□ □□□) without the final Nun (N):
    - □ (N) = 50 (subtracted)
    - □ (R) = 200
    - □ (O) = 6
    - □ (Q) = 100
    - □ (S) = 60
    - □ (R) = 200
    - **Total** = 616

Analysis of Reliability

- **Majority Texts (666):** The majority of ancient manuscripts contain the number 666, suggesting it was the widely accepted version.
- **Alternate Reading (616):** The existence of 616 in some manuscripts reflects an early variant that still points to Nero but shows flexibility in the gematria method used.

Conclusion On 666 & 616

Which Number to Rely On?

- **666:** Given that 666 is present in the majority of manuscripts and aligns with the traditional interpretation, it is generally considered the more reliable number. This consistency across most early texts suggests it was the original intent of the author of Revelation.
- **616:** The presence of 616, while a minority reading, does not significantly alter the interpretation but rather shows an adaptation of the gematria system to reflect the same historical figure, Nero.

Both numbers ultimately point to the same conclusion, identifying Nero Caesar as the Beast through gematria, reflecting different linguistic adaptations.

Additional Scriptural References

Revelation 13:16-17 (KJV): “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”

Historical and Scholarly References

1. **Josephus, *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*:** Historical context of Nero's persecution and the Jewish War.
2. **Tacitus, *Annals* and *Histories*:** Roman historical accounts of Nero's reign.
3. **Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*:** Early church father who discusses the number 666.
4. **Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus:** Key manuscripts containing the number 666.
5. **Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus and Papyrus 115 (P115):** Manuscripts containing the number 616.

By understanding the historical, textual, and linguistic contexts, both numbers 666 and 616 are seen as pointing to Nero Caesar, with 666 being the more widely accepted and traditional interpretation.

Nero's Cruelty

Scripture Reference:
Revelation 13:7 (KJV): "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."

Historical Accounts:

- **Tacitus:** Describes Nero's extreme cruelty and persecution of Christians, using them as scapegoats for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD.
- **Pliny the Elder:** Refers to Nero as the "destroyer of the human race" and "the poison of the world."

Nero’s Self-Deification

Scripture Reference:
Revelation 13:4 (KJV): “And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?”

Historical Evidence:

- **Inscription in Athens:** Praises Nero as “All powerful Nero Caesar Sebastian a new Apollo.”
- **Coins:** Nero minted coins featuring his image with a radiate crown, symbolizing the sun and associating himself with Apollo, the sun god.

Graffiti in Pompeii

Scripture Reference:
Revelation 13:17 (KJV): “And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”

Historical Example:
Graffiti found in Pompeii stating “I love her who is 545” demonstrates the use of gematria in personal expressions, indicating that people encoded names and messages numerically.

Modern Interpretations of 666

Scripture Reference:
Revelation 13:16-18 (KJV): “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore

and six.”

Discussion:

- **Historical View:** The early identification of 666 with Nero via gematria is well-supported by historical evidence.
- **Modern Speculations:** Various interpretations, such as linking 666 to political figures or technological systems, often lack scholarly support and are speculative.
- **Scholarly Caution:** Emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and symbolic context of Revelation.

Proper Representation of 666

Scripture Reference:
Revelation 13:18 (KJV): “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

Discussion:

- **Biblical Text:** “Six hundred threescore and six” or “six hundred sixty-six” aligns with the original Greek phrasing.
- **Modern Usage:** “Six-six-six” is a simplified verbalization that may detract from the symbolic and textual integrity of the original phrasing.

Conclusion

The historical and symbolic interpretation of the number 666 in Revelation ties closely to Nero and the oppressive Roman

regime. Understanding the context of early Christian persecution and the use of gematria provides a deeper insight into the text's meaning. Modern speculative interpretations often lack the rigor and context provided by historical scholarship.

References

1. **Revelation 13:18 (KJV):** "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six."
2. **Josephus, *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*:** Historical accounts of high priests and the destruction of Jerusalem.
3. **Tacitus, *Annals* and *Histories*:** Roman accounts of Nero's reign and persecution of Christians.
4. **Cassius Dio, *Roman History*:** Descriptions of Tiridates I worshipping Nero.
5. **Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*:** Early church father's interpretation linking 666 with Nero.
6. **Numismatic Evidence:** Coins depicting Nero with radiate crowns, symbolizing his self-deification.
7. **Graffiti in Pompeii:** Example of personal use of gematria in ancient times.
8. **Modern Scholarly Works:** G.K. Beale's *The Book of Revelation* and other scholarly articles on numerology and symbolism in Revelation.

By synthesizing these sources and interpretations, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical and symbolic dimensions of the number 666 and its portrayal in Revelation. This exploration underscores the significance of contextual analysis and the caution needed in speculative interpretations.