Revelation 13:18 – An Exegetical Study of The Verse

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 This view is based on external historical references.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.