

The Number 666, Part 1

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This article first appeared in *The Messenger of Living Righteousness*, April 1966. Brother Bill Race was a friend of Fred Wright, and fellow-believer in the message at least as early as 1962, when they were both involved in the Brinsmead Awakening.

This study was the first new understanding of the interpretation of the infamous 666 number of *Revelation* 13. Later, this understanding grew, and that further light is presented in Part 2 of this topic.

Revelation 13

¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him that has understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred, three score and six.

In all our efforts to understand this text of Scripture and to apply that number as the Lord intended that we should, let us take warning from the words,

“Let him that hath understanding count the number.”

From this we can only conclude that those only who do have that understanding can possibly count that number to know what it means. To all else it will only be a mystery. We must conclude also, that the understanding of this verse is not something that lies openly on the surface, but one that can be understood only through the understanding of the everlasting gospel.

Somebody, somewhere, quite a long while ago read the verse and reasoned that since it was the number of a name, all that he had to do was to take a name and figure out its numerical value. He lit upon the name of the Pope, no doubt because he is the head of the great apostate system of Antichrist, and, by taking the numerical value of his title, *Vicarius Filii Dei*, he was able to show that it added up very neatly to 666.

Having done that he stopped right there because that was exactly what he wanted to prove anyway, and that seemed so

simple and conclusive that it completely satisfied everyone else that wanted to see the same thing proved.

A very decided snag in this system of interpretation is that this is not the only name of a religious head that happens to add up to 666. So that leaves the whole matter in a very inconclusive state.

But the number *can* be counted. So let us apply to it the wisdom that is from above using the principles of interpretation on which the Bible is built.

The first principle that must be used is that the Scripture must be read in its context and, in the light of that context, we naturally must ask the question,

“Which beast?”

That is an important question because there are altogether in the books of *Daniel* and the *Revelation* eight beast powers brought to view. In some instances several different beasts are used to describe the one power such as the Bear of *Daniel* 7 and the Ram of *Daniel* 8 which both symbolized the Medo-Persian power.

In *Revelation* no less than five of these beasts are mentioned and are as follows:

1. The Great Red Dragon of *Revelation* 12 which symbolized the Pagan Roman Empire;
2. The Leopard-like Beast of *Revelation* 13:1-10, which symbolized the Papacy from 538-1798 AD;
3. The Beast from the Bottomless Pit of *Revelation* 11:7,8 which symbolized the rise of Atheism in 1798;
4. The beast of *Revelation* 13:11-17 which is the rise of apostate Protestantism in the USA; and,
5. The Scarlet colored beast of *Revelation* 17.

So which beast is represented? That is the question!

Let us see which beast is under consideration when this

statement is made. In this chapter the beast under consideration in the first ten verses is the Leopard-like Beast which we know to be the Papacy (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 439).

But the discussion of this power closes with verse 10 and from then on through the rest of the Chapter the activities of the Lamb-like Beast that comes to speak as a dragon are under consideration.

It is true that the Leopard-like Beast is mentioned three times in these verses (verses 12, 14, and 15), but this is only incidental. It is not that beast which is the subject of this prophecy. It is the Lamb-like or Image beast that is the subject of this prophecy. He is the beast of the prophecy so therefore when the verse says,

“Count the number of the beast,”

...it can only be the beast of this prophecy and that is the Image Beast and no other.

This is not a new idea that we are presenting here. It is a recalling of the understanding and the position of the earliest Adventists. For proof of this we quote the words of James White:

A Word to the Little Flock, p. 9:

This last power that treads down the saints is brought to view in Revelation 13:11-18. His number is 666.

That leaves no question as to what James Whites understanding was at that time. He plainly states that it was the Image Beast that was numbered as 666.

The same document contains the only reference that we have from Ellen White to this number. She says:

A Word to the Little Flock, p. 19:

I saw all that “would not receive the mark of the Beast, and his Image, in their foreheads or in their hands.” could not buy or sell. I saw that the number (666) of the image Beast was made up.

Two distinct and valuable pieces of information emerge from these statements:

1. Both of these writers applied the number to the Image Beast.
2. The making up of that number is not completed until the “buy and sell decree” is in force. Therefore that number is not yet made up and is not to be found as yet as the full number 666.

This also proves very conclusively that the principle of interpretation by which the number has been applied to the Pope of Rome is very wrong. For if that principle is correct then we must be able to find in the name of the Image Beast the numeric value of 666. But this cannot be done. You may take any one of the names of the Image Beast and try to add up the numeric value and always it is a long way out.

So far we have found conclusive evidence to prove that the number is specifically applied to the name of the Image Beast, that the number will not be made up till the very end of probationary time, and that the system of interpretation whereby it is sought to prove that the name itself adds up to a numerical value of 666 is a very wrong system.

The question then arises, What is the real significance of the number 666? It is a good question and one that the Bible does answer. But to find the answer we must go further afield than simply *Revelation* 13:18 for

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 585:

In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end.

Therefore the information given in Revelation 13:18 on this number, is only the last piece in the revealing of what it means, and it will be necessary to understand the rest of the Bible on this question before we can understand the verse here in the last book.

The Bible itself warns us when it says,

“Let him that has understanding count the number.”

The understanding required is a knowledge of the spiritual import of the rest of the Scriptures. We are to bring that understanding to the study of this number.

Ecclesiastes 1

⁹ The thing that has been it is that which shall be: and that which is done is that which shall be done and there is no new thing under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 3

¹⁵ That which has been is now; and that which is to be hath already been and God requires that which is passed.

Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 116:

Past history will be repeated...Study Revelation in connection with Daniel; for history will be repeated.

Before we turn to the rest of the Scriptures let us gather the facts to be investigated from the verse itself. The idea has been held that this is the number of an individual man, of one specific man, but the verse itself in the original does not say that. The literal translation from the Greek reads as follows:

“For it is number *of man*. And his number is six hundred and sixty six.”

In the Greek there is no indefinite article “a”, so that it literally says “of man” rather than “of a man”. So this is not the number of any particular man but of mankind in general.

Also note that it is the number of his name (*Revelation* 13:17).

The book of *Revelation* is a book of symbols. For instance the 144,000 are said to be “virgins” but we know that many of them will be men. But they will be virgins in the spiritual sense...

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 406:

...because they profess a pure faith.

In the same way, the name of the Beast and the number of

that name are symbols which are employed to convey a rich spiritual lesson and message to the searcher for truth. Rightly understood they will be a richer revealing of the principles of the everlasting gospel.

A very important consideration is that this number is something that we must gain the victory over if we would stand at last on the sea of glass (see *Revelation* 15:2). In *The Great Controversy*, page 441, the symbol of the Beast is defined. On page 445 the Image is defined, and on page 445-446 the mark is defined. In those pages it is stated that there is to be a very clear cut distinction between those who have the victory over that Beast, his number and his mark, and those who do not. That distinction is just this:

Those who have that victory are those who serve the living God and those who have not that victory are those that are the slaves to the power of that Beast.

There is nothing more clearly taught in the gospel than that those who serve sin are slaves to sin. They do not have any choice at all. Those who are the servants of the Living God *do* have the choice as to whether they will remain in their freedom or whether they will go back to the slavery of sin, but this is not true of him who is a slave of sin. Jesus Himself made this forever plain when he said,

John 8

³⁴ He that committs sin is the servant of sin.

The whole purpose and intent of the Gospel is to set men free from that bondage and enable them to live a holy life, if they desire to be set free and will lay hold of the offered gift. This is the basis of the whole controversy and in the last days that controversy over that very issue is to come to its full and final head and settlement.

Therefore the victory over that Beast and his number is but the full and the final victory over sin and its power.

That final submission to eternal slavery or the final deliverance from it, will be by the personal choice of each individual, in the light of the knowledge of what sin is and on what righteousness is.

The Great Controversy, p. 605:

The decree is not to be urged upon the people blindly. Every one is to have sufficient light to make his decision intelligently.

Everything the gospel is pictured in the symbolism of the Old Testament Sanctuary and its services in one way or another. It was given for the very purpose of making the gospel plain and we have a great deal yet to see, to learn and to understand from that lesson book.

Let us turn to the instruction that the Lord gave to Israel in the matter of dealing with slaves in the Old Testament ritual:

Exodus 21

¹ Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them.

² If you buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

³ If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

⁴ If his master has given him a wife, and she has born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

⁵ And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children: I will not go out free:

⁶ Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post: and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

Now let us note the facts of this passage. A man is a slave to his master. But the Lord had appointed that the slavery could only go on for six years. Then the man could go out completely free. But, if because of what his slave master had given to him, he chose to remain a slave, then he could choose

that way. Note that he would make that choice in the intelligence of knowing exactly what slavery was. If he made that choice in the light of that knowledge then the matter was committed to judgment and he was marked with a permanent mark and became a slave forever. He could never again be a free man.

Now, in this case, what is the number of that slavery? Obviously it is the number six, which is the number of man throughout the whole Bible, for it is after six years that he makes that choice and that mark is the evidence that he has served that number of years before he made that choice.

Is this not an exact picture of the situation that will exist in the final and finishing stage of the great controversy?

Man is the slave. Sin is the master. But the Lord has appointed that there is a limit to the time that man can be held in that slavery and that time is 6,000 years. And at the end of that time God has decreed that man is to go out free for nothing if he will.

But it may be that he is so attached to the goods that his master the Devil has given him, such as his wife and his children, his houses, his lands and his possessions, that he chooses to remain there with them in slavery. The Lord does not force him. He can choose as he will. But that choice is now made in the full intelligence of what sin is, after a lifetime of it and after the fullness of the complete history of it.

The matter is taken up in Judgment and the mark is placed there forever in...

Revelation 13

¹⁷ ...their right hand or in their foreheads.

Now he is a slave forever. There will never again be any reversal of that decision.

Revelation 22

¹¹ He that is unjust let him be unjust still, and he that is

filthy let him be filthy still.

This will be the irrevocable decree of that day. And the number six is the number of that mark because the presence of that mark is instant evidence to all, that man has chosen to be a slave forever after six thousand years of evidence and experience in sin.

The number 666 is the number of man. It is not the number of any man, but of man as he stands in the full light of the glory of the message of the angel of *Revelation* 18:1-4; and in the full light of the experience of sin. He knows what it is to be a slave, and yet, knowing all that, still chooses to be a servant of sin forever, with no further hope of ever reversing that decision.

The Devil is marshaling all his forces now to ensure that he retains every possible captive in that day. He is not willing to lose even one of them. Something of the fanatical intensity of his purpose is illustrated in the wild determination of Pharaoh to hold his slaves in spite of the desperate situation which his defiance was bringing upon Egypt.

So will the Devil work again. He is preparing for that final contest today and every day, and every one of us is the target of his determined wiles to keep us in his power forever. He is seeking to have us so bound to worldly things that our attention will be fully engrossed by these things and we cling to them forever.

The Great Controversy, p. 449:

But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then, whosoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honour Popery above God. He is paying homage to Rome, and to the power which enforces the institution ordained by Rome. He is worshipping the beast and his image.

And in doing so he will receive the mark of the Beast and

become forever a slave to sin and bear the number of that name which is 666.

The Great Controversy, p. 450:

Although church and state will unite their power to compel all both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive the mark of the beast, yet the people of God will not receive it. The prophet of Patmos beholds them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God, and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

The worship of the beast and the image is a description of *what we do*. But the number is a symbol of *what we are*, and what we will have chosen to remain as, forever.

Dear Reader! Today, are you preparing to receive that number as the symbol of the choice that you will then finally and eternally make? Or you are preparing to receive the seal of the living God, the number of which is 144,000? What you do today is determining the result then, for only those who have made the most diligent preparation will be able to stand.

Today, we must know what it is to have the victory over every known sin, every day. Today, we must choose not to remain in bondage to sin. Today, in the living power of a living God, we must triumph over the power of the Devil and his evil hosts.