

Revelation 13:11-18

- Who is afraid of the number 666? Be wise! -

Author: Evert Jan Hempenius

© 2018

www.christianstudylibrary.org

For any questions about this Scripture passage or the notes, please contact us through the Contact Us tab on the website.

Foreword

- ❖ Who is afraid of the number 666 (Revelation 13:18)? I'm not! It is not the number of Satan, the devil, the serpent, the dragon. It is not the number of the Antichrist. It is just the number of man.
It is the number of a man or human, who has godly aspirations. The number 666 is a so-called triangle number. This means that a triangle can be made by using for instance 666 pebbles, just like a triangle can be made from three, six or ten pebbles. Within the context of Revelation, triangle numbers refer to the godly realm.
- ❖ Revelation 13:11-18 describes the mechanisms of persecution when the political powers and ideologies ask the predominant religion of atheism for support of their agenda.
This calls for wisdom not for fear. The main question is, how to deal as Christian with a man, an Emperor, a government, an ideology with godly aspirations and requesting worship and total obedience from the people of a nation.
A Christian and the church must know that Christ has overcome all powers, and all ideologies (Revelation 11:15).
- ❖ Revelation 13:1-18 opens our eyes to the mechanisms of past and modern-day persecutions.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological notes, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline show some overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the book of Revelation. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline either as a "stand alone" or as part of a series.

Context

- ❖ The Book of Revelation is like a large painting. You'll have to look at the whole to understand the details.

❖ A brief outline of the Book of Revelation:¹

Introduction (Rev 1:1-3)	
	The origin and command to write this Revelation down.
The Book of Revelation (Rev 1:4-22:21)	
Rev 1:4-8	The opening liturgical setting.
Rev 1:9-3:22	PART 1
Rev 4:1-22:11	PART 2
Rev 22:12-21	The closing liturgical setting.

- PART 1: The risen and exalted Christ and his seven messages to the seven churches in the Roman Province Asia.
- PART 2: The heavenly courtroom and the judgment of God, ending with the descent of the new heaven and earth.
 - PART 2: There are three main **stages** in this part of the Revelation. Each stage is introduced by a vision of the heavenly courtroom in which God resides as the Creator-King and Judge of all creation.
 - Revelation 3:11-18 is part of **stage 3**.

Part 2 (Rev 4:1-22:11)	
Stage 1	Rev 4:1-7:17 > the first six seals.
Stage 2	Rev 8:1-11:14 > (the seventh seal) and the first six trumpets.
Stage 3	Rev 11:15-22:11 > (the seventh trumpet) and the seven bowls of God's wrath > the two cities (the fate of Babylon and promise of the New Jerusalem.
Stage 3 (Rev 11:15-22:11)	
Rev 11:15-19	The Heavenly Courtroom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the

¹ This outline for sermons is very brief and does not discuss all the (many) different theories about the structures and outlines of the Book of Revelation. Beale (1999) provides a detailed outline. For discussion see Garrow (1997).

	world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”
Rev 12:1-16:22	“The book of signs.”
Rev 17:1-22:8	The Fate of Babylon and the final Judgment of God
Rev 22:9-22:11	The Descent of the New Jerusalem, a New Heaven and a New Earth

- Revelation 12:1-16:22 is called “The book of signs” because each of the main passages is introduced by a (great) sign:
 - Revelation 12:1 “A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.”
 - Revelation 12:3 “Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.”
 - Revelation 15:1 “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.”
 - The “great signs” reminds us of Moses (Exod. 4:17, 30; 10:2; 11:10).²

“The book of signs” (Rev 2:1-16:22)	
Rev 12:1-14:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rev 12 > The woman and the dragon – the war of the dragon against the children of the woman = the church of Christ. ❖ Rev 13:1-10 > The beast from the sea. ❖ Rev 13:11-18 > The beast from the earth. ❖ Rev 14:1-20 > The victory of the Lamb and his wrath.
Rev 15:1-16:22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rev 15 > The heavenly courtroom and the seven angels with the seven bowls of God’s wrath. ❖ Rev 16 > The seven bowls of God’s wrath are poured out.

- ❖ There is much discussion about the date of writing of the Revelation.
 - Some commentators propose a date near the reign of Emperor Nero (A.D. 68).

² Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 708).

- Others propose a date during the reign of emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

Form and structure

- ❖ Revelation 13:11-18 is the second part of chapter 13 which deals with the two beasts, the first beast coming from the sea, the second beast coming from the earth.
- ❖ A detailed outline:

Revelation 13:11-18	
<i>Introduction of the vision (verse 11)</i>	Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.
<i>Worship of the first beast (verse 12-13)</i>	He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.
<i>Enforcement to worship the first beast (verse 14-17)</i>	He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.
<i>The call for wisdom (verse 18)</i>	This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

Theological notes

- ❖ The Book of Revelation is Trinitarian (God – Holy Spirit – Jesus Christ; Rev 1:4-5) in character.
 - God is the first and the last (Rev 1:8) – Jesus Christ is the first and the last (Rev 1:17).
 - Jesus Christ speaks to the churches (Rev 2:1-6) and the churches are summoned to listen to what the Spirit (Rev 2:7) says.
 - Note the Trinitarian character of Rev 5:

- God, Creator residing on his throne
 - The Son, the Lamb, standing in the midst
 - The seven spirits, sent by the Son to the corners of the earth (East, West, North, South), who is identical with the Holy Spirit of God.
- ❖ The Book of Revelation is foremost a liturgical book with prayers, doxologies, confessions, prophecies, and visions. It shows the heavenly liturgy in images and this liturgy affects the history of this world when the plagues of God strike this earth. Rev 4:11 explains why: **“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”**
- This is the priority in the life of every human being: to glorify God.
 - This liturgical book reminds us of the liturgy in the tabernacle (especially) and the temple of the Old Testament. This explains the many references to the altars and the priestly appearances of Christ and some of his angels.
 - Revelation 5 contains three songs of glorification and one acclamation “Amen”.
- ❖ The book of Revelation is also a prophetic book about the past, the present and the future. It sheds light on the past, the present situation of the seven churches in Asia Minor, and the future, culminating in the promise of the new heaven and the new earth.
- From chapter 4 onwards the judgment of God is the dominating theme. He will do justice (Rev 4-5; Rev 6:10; Rev 21:1-15 and other passages).

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

General remark


- ❖ Several hermeneutical questions can be asked about the exposition and application of the Book of Revelation. This sermon outline focusses on the question, how can we understand the Revelation within the context of the end of the first century?
- ❖ Reading and understanding the Book of Revelation requires:
- Profound knowledge of the Old Testament.
 - Especially the books of Exodus and Numbers, Ezekiel and Daniel are important for study. These books are related to oppression and deliverance of the people of God (Egypt and Babylon).
 - Knowledge of the Greek-Roman world of the first century.
 - Knowledge of figures of speech, because of all the metaphors and other figures of speech, and the meaning and use of numbers.
 - Knowledge of the structure of Revelation (see above).
 - (Elementary) knowledge of Hermeneutics.

- ❖ John received this Revelation from Jesus Christ and at the same time, this Revelation reveals the risen and exalted Christ, who holds the keys of (life and) death and Hades (Rev 1:17). John understood the words he heard, the visions he saw, though sometimes they needed to be explained to him (Rev 1:19-20).
- ❖ John wrote down what he heard and saw in this book and sent it to the seven churches in Asia Minor, an important province of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In these seven messages to the churches of Asia, Jesus Christ addresses major aspects of church life. He praises and rebukes them and gives them the promises of the life to come. Christians, members of these churches, understood these messages. Two people are mentioned by name. The churches were warned for a movement called the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6; 2:15). These Christians were far more familiar with the figures of speech used in the Revelation than we are nowadays.
 - Figures of speech are not always easily understood by 21st-century readers. They are sometimes explained, more often not. Figures of speech allow more than one explanation and application. This explains in part the multitude of commentaries and theories.
 - In the process of explaining and applying the prophecies of this book, the interpreter should ask himself two questions:
 - To which exegetical tradition do I belong? There are a plethora of traditions, especially in the Anglo-American World. To mention only three:
 - Amillennialism;
 - Postmillennialism;
 - Premillennialism.
 - Secondly, the interpreter should be aware of his own situation and of the local Christian community. What is my own political-religious situation and how does this situation affect my reading and understanding of the Book of Revelation?

A short note on the symbolical use of numbers and the number 666

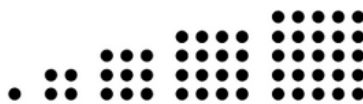
- ❖ Numbers play an important and symbolical role in the Book of Revelation.
 - They have a numerical value but, what is more important, they have also a symbolical value. The numbers which are used can be grouped as follows:

Group	Number	Meaning
Triangle numbers ³	$3 = 1 + 2$	Vertical axis: heaven, earth, and the waters beneath the earth. It is also the number of God.

³ Triangle numbers: 1, 3, 6 and 10:  ; and also 666.

	$6 = 1 + 2 + 3$ $10 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4$ $666 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4$ $+ \dots + 34 + 35 + 36$	<p>A number of near perfection or completeness.</p> <p>A number of fullness.</p> <p>For a discussion, see below.</p>
Square numbers ⁴	$4 = 2 \times 2$	<p>Horizontal plane, the four corners of the earth. This is often reflected in the use of four designations for the same noun: every tribe (1) and language (2) and people (3) and nation (4) (Rev 5:9).</p> <p>And: the dragon (1), that ancient serpent (2), who is the devil (3), or Satan (4) (Rev 20:1).</p>
	$144 = 12 \times 12$	This number can mean: the people of God (12) will inherit the whole earth.
Cubic number	$1000 = 10 \times 10 \times 10$	The number of space and time of God. The holiest place was a cube (1 Kings 6:20). It is also the number of eternity.
Special cases	2 $7 = 3 + 4$ $12 = 3 \times 4$ $42 = 1260 = \text{times, time and half time}$ (Rev 11:2-3; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5)	<p>Number of a (true) witness</p> <p>The number of (holy) Fullness</p> <p>The number of the people of God</p> <p>This number refers to the 42 sites of rest of the Israelites during their wandering in the desert before they entered the promised land (Num 33).</p>

⁴ Square numbers: 1, 4, 9, 16, 25:



Persecution

- ❖ It is helpful to study the circumstances and the persecution of Christians during the first four centuries A.D., and later, with respect of the Book of Revelation.
- ❖ “Between 109 and 111, Pliny the Younger was sent by the emperor Trajan (r. 98-117) to the province of Bithynia (in Anatolia) as governor, and their correspondence is considered a valuable historical source. In one of his letters (Letter 10.96), Pliny reports on his actions with regard to some people who had been denounced as Christians, some of them anonymously: those that persisted in confessing that they were Christians he had executed or, if Roman citizens, sent to Rome; those who denied that they were Christians he subjected to the test of invoking the gods, offering them incense and a libation in the presence of an image of the emperor, and cursing Christ. Some who admitted that they had formerly been Christians but proved, by passing the test, that they were such no longer declared that Christians did not commit the crimes attributed to them, a declaration confirmed under torture by two slave women who were called deaconesses. Pliny therefore asked the emperor whether ceasing to be a Christian was enough to secure pardon for having been one, and whether punishment was merited just for being a Christian (“the name itself”) or only for the crimes associated with the name. Trajan responded that the problem could only be dealt with case by case. The authorities were not to seek Christians out, but people who were denounced and found guilty were to be punished unless, by worshipping the Roman gods, they proved they were not Christians (having denied Christ) and so obtained pardon. Anonymous denunciations were to be ignored”⁵
- ❖ “In 250 the emperor Decius issued an edict⁶, the text of which has been lost, requiring everyone in the Empire (except Jews, who were exempted) to perform a sacrifice to the gods in the presence of a Roman magistrate and obtain a signed and witnessed certificate, called a libellus, to this effect. The decree was part of Decius' drive to restore traditional Roman values and there is no evidence that Christians were specifically being targeted. A number of these certificates still exist and one discovered in Egypt (text of papyrus, figure 1 below) reads: *“To those in charge of the sacrifices of the village Theadelphia, from Aurelia Bellias, daughter of Peteres, and her daughter Kapinis. We have always been constant in sacrificing to the gods, and now too, in your presence, in accordance with the regulations, I have poured libations and sacrificed and tasted the offerings, and I ask you to certify this for us below. May you continue to prosper. (Second person's handwriting) We, Aurelius Serenus and Aurelius Hermas, saw you sacrificing. (Third person's handwriting) I, Hermas, certify. The first year of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messias Quintus Traianus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, Pauni 27.”*⁷

⁵ Persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. (2018, August 29). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire#Trajan

⁶ See also: Decian persecution. (2018, July 26). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decian_persecution

⁷ Persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. (2018, August 29). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire#Decius

Exposition

Preliminary Remark and a short summary

- ❖ The whole passage is not easy to explain. Some details remain obscure and we only can guess where the images refer to what their message is. Although not all the details are clear, the general message is. It is about worshipping the Roman Emperor as a god and Roma as a goddess. Everyone is forced to participate.
- ❖ Revelation 13:18 is a strong admonition for Christians who lived in the first centuries A.D to act wise and not to fear, because they are not dealing with gods, but with man(kind), who wants to be worshiped as a god.

Preceding context of Revelation 13

- ❖ The eternal kingship of Christ has been declared:
 - “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever’” (11:15).
- ❖ The church has been warned for the attacks of Satan and the devil:
 - Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down’” (12:10).
 - Accuser = Satan
 - “Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!’ But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”
 - The devil = the dragon, the serpent, Satan (see Revelation 12)
 - The dragon recurs in Revelation 13:1, 11.
 - Dragon = Serpent *and* Devil = Satan. His main weapons are lies and deceit.
 - The sea is mentioned again in Revelation 13:1:
 - “And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.”
 - The symbolical meaning of “sea” can refer:
 - To the turmoil and history of this earth giving rise to powerful nations (Dan 7:2, 3).
 - To the Mediterranean Sea, the Mare Nostrum (Our Sea) of the Roman Empire. See also Revelation 18:17, 19.

- The earth is again mentioned in Revelation 13:11:
“Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.”
 - The symbolical meaning of “earth” can refer
 - To the inhabitants of the (Roman) world and especially the inhabitants of Asia Minor.
- ❖ The imagery of Revelation 13:1 and 11
 - **“Beast”** = Political and religious power; an earthly Kingdom. See Daniel 7:1-8. Within the context of Revelation, it is equated with the Roman Empire.
 - **“Horn”** = sign of political, judicial and military power.
 - **“Head”** = symbol of the reigning Roman Emperor, who adorned himself with godly epithets (titles) = **“blasphemous name”**.
 - **“Crown”** = **“διάδημα”**: a type of crown employed as a symbol of the highest ruling power in a particular area and therefore often associated with kingship—‘diadem crown.’ A crown may be described as a ‘symbol of his power, worn on his head.’⁸

Verse 11

- ❖ **“Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth.”**
 - There are two **“beasts.”** The first beast is mentioned in Revelation 13:1. It represents the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor. The second beast represents the political and religious powers of Asia Minor.
 - In Revelation 19:20 the second beast is called the false prophet:
 - “But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf.”
- ❖ **“He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.”**
 - The Roman Emperor was hailed as the Lord and Saviour, just like Jesus.
 - Lord = **“κύριος”**: *lord, master*
3. of gods, especially in the East; of deified rulers: hence, of rulers in general; of Roman Emperors (Augustus, Claudius) etc.⁹
 - Saviour = **“σωτήρ”**: *saviour, deliverer*. Title of Zeus and other gods: Apollo, Hermes. Also, **3.** applied to rulers, Roman Emperors or governors.¹⁰
 - More information is found here.¹¹

⁸ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, Vol 1, p. 76).

⁹ Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996, p. 1013).

¹⁰ Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996, p. 1751).

¹¹ Imperial cult of ancient Rome. (2018, August 20). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_of_ancient_Rome#The_Imperial_cult_and_Christianity

- Christ already warned for the false prophets: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” (Mt 7:15; see also Mt 24:1-51).

Verse 12-13

- ❖ **Remark.** The NIV translates the following verbs in the past tense, where the **ESV** translates the same verbs in the present tense, as they are used in Greek:
 - “exercised” – “**exercises**” / “made” – “**makes**” / “performed” – “**performs**” (Rev 12:12, 13).
 - “deceived” – “**deceives**” (Rev 13:14).
 - “forced” – “**causes**” (Rev 13:16).
 - Bratcher and Hatton remark: “A translator must decide here, as elsewhere, what effect the shift of tense will have on the reader.”¹² In addition: **The exegete must decide what the effect of the usage of the present tense would have had on the first hearers.** There are some options:¹³
 - The present tense may be used to describe a scene in progress, especially in narrative literature: *at this present time*.¹⁴
 - The present tense may be used to describe an action which, begun in the past, continues in the present. The emphasis is on the present time.¹⁵
 - The present tense may be used to describe an event that *repeatedly* happens, or an action that *regularly occurs* or an *ongoing state*.¹⁶
 - Taking these observations into account and the call for wisdom (Rev 13:18), a call addressed to the first readers makes it plausible that **Revelation 13:11-18 described the present situation of the first readers.** They were suffering from political and religious oppression, causing economic and social isolation.
- ❖ **“He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf.”**
 - The second beast is the representative of the first beast. When the first beast is identified with the reigning power of Rome, the second beast can be identified with the local political and religious powers in Asia Minor.
- ❖ **“And made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.”**

¹² Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993, p. 201).

¹³ See Wallace, D.B. (1996, p. 513-539).

¹⁴ Wallace, D.B. (1996, p. 518).

¹⁵ Wallace, D.B. (1996, p. 519).

¹⁶ Wallace, D.B. (1996, p. 520, 521).

- “the inhabitants” is used of those who are not God’s people.¹⁷ Emperor worship did occur in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire.
- ❖ **“whose fatal wound had been healed”** This is a reference to the former description of the first beast (Rev 13:3, 4):
 - “One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men **worshiped** the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also **worshiped** the beast and asked, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?’”
 - **“Fatal wound.”** He would have died if he didn’t recover. But he was healed (unexpectedly).
 - **Worship** is the dominating theme in Revelation 13.
- ❖ **“And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.”**
 - (See also: Mt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9.)
 - It is interesting to note that Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* referred to “causing fire come down from heaven”:
 - “It is related in our Annals, **that by certain sacred rites and imprecations, thunder-storms may be compelled or invoked.** There is an old report in Etruria, that thunder was invoked when the city of Volsinium had its territory laid waste by a monster named Volta. **Thunder was also invoked by King Porsenna.** And L. Piso, a very respectable author, states in the first book of his Annals, that this had been frequently done before his time by Numa, and that Tullus Hostilius, imitating him, but not having properly performed the ceremonies, was struck with the lightning”¹⁸

Verse 14-17

- ❖ **“Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.”**
 - **“The signs”** are meant to impress the people.
 - **“He deceived the inhabitants of the earth.”** See also Revelation 19:20).
 - **“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and **Satan, the deceiver of the whole world**—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him”** (Rev 12:9; 20:3).
 - **“He was given power.”** By whom? Is it a *divine passive* meaning “God gave the second beast the power”? It is better to translate “God allowed the second beast to have the power.” The beast is responsible for abusing this power by deceiving the inhabitants. Still, God is in control!

¹⁷ Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993, p. 202).

¹⁸ Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S., H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A., Ed. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0137:book=2:chapter=54>

- ❖ **“He ordered them to set up an image in honor.”**
 - The inhabitants of the earth are impressed by the signs. They are ready to set up an image. The history of Nebuchadnezzar and his golden image is a telling illustration (Dan 3).
- ❖ **“The beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.”**
 - We cannot with certainty identify one of the Roman Emperors matching this description.
- ❖ **“He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak.”**
 - Who did give him this power? It is better to translate “He was allowed...” The beast is responsible. God is in control!
 - It is still an image, an image that was erected, an image that couldn’t walk, nor move!
- ❖ **“And cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.”**
 - **“Cause.”** The image didn’t order by its “voice” to kill all those who refused worship. This might indicate that the “speaking of the image” was only meant to impress the people. It is the second beast that causes the killing.
 - Beale quotes Price: “Price has concluded that ‘the establishment of the provincial cult of Domitian at Ephesus, with its colossal statue, is what lies behind’ the depiction in Revelation 13 of believers being put to death for not worshipping the image of the beast. Though sounding overly confident, Price appears justified in saying that ‘no other interpretation [of Revelation 13] which fits the known geographical and temporal contexts’ is as suitable as this, especially since this event at Ephesus ‘involved the participation of the whole province, as attested by the series of dedications by numerous cities.’ Price reasons that such large-scale involvement by the entire province led to unusually strong pressure on Christians to conform.”¹⁹
 - “Against this background, it is understandable that popular pressure on and animosity against Christians would come at times of such public festivals when the Christians refused to participate in these corporate expressions of idolatrous religio-political loyalty.”²⁰
 - **“And all who refused.”** The meaning of “all” is determined by the context, the literary and the historical context.
 - Beale remarks: “Certainly not all believers found themselves in this situation, just as it must be assumed that many Jews refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image, yet only the three youths of Daniel 3 were actually called to account and thrown into the furnace for the offense. Not all of the Roman provincial councils would have necessarily enforced this punishment on all those who disobeyed, which is supported by Revelation 2–3, where John does not expect all the churches to undergo such harsh measures. Surely much

¹⁹ Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 712), Price, S. (2009, p. 197, 198).

²⁰ Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 713).

persecution was due to local enthusiasm for the imperial cult, which was probably not felt throughout the whole of Asia Minor.”²¹

❖ **“He also forced everyone,... , to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead”**

- **“Mark”**. “The mark is clearly figurative of the ways in which the state keeps check on whether people submit to compulsory idol worship. Possibly, as in the later persecutions under Diocletian and Decius, certificates were issued to those loyal to the emperor and participating in the required ritual of the imperial religion.” “the mark alludes to the state’s political and economic “stamp of approval,” given only to those who go along with its religious demands.”²²
 - The Revelation warns severely against anyone who received this mark: “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath’ (Rev 14:9, 10; 16:2). “There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name” (Rev 14:11)
 - There is also the promise: “And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. **They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark** on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev 20:4).
- The **“mark”** is the opposite of the seal of God “put on the foreheads of the servants of God” (Rev 7:3).

❖ **“So that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.”**

- The effect of the mark is twofold. Christians were socially and economically marginalized.

Verse 18

❖ **“This calls for wisdom.”** This is the second call of three, found within Revelation 13-14:

- “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go.
If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.
This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints” (Rev 13:10).
- **“This calls for wisdom.** If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666” (Rev 13:18).
- **“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus”** (Rev 14:12).

²¹ Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 714).

²² Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 715).

- Compare:
 - **“This calls for a mind with wisdom.** The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits” (Rev 19:9).
- ❖ **“If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666.”**
 - **“Insight”** or understanding.
 - **“Beast”** refers to the first beast.
 - **“Calculate”** = **“ψηφίζω”**: 1. **to add up digits and calculate a total**, *count (up), calculate, reckon* (literally ‘with pebbles’) (Lk 14:28). 2. **to probe a number for its meaning, interpret, figure out.**²³
 - Both meanings, “to add up digits” and “to probe a number for its meaning” are needed. The total has been given. When we add up the digits 1 to 36, the total will be 666, a triangle number.
 - “In some languages, including Hebrew and Greek, numbers were represented by letters, and each letter had a numerical value. The number of a name would be the sum total of the numerical value of the letters of that name.”²⁴ The number might refer to Emperor Nero but only when the Hebrew letters are used.
 - The total is given (666) and an indefinite reference to “man.”
 - **“For it is man’s number.”** “It is the number of **humankind.**”²⁵
 - 666 is also a triangle number. (See for an explanation above). Triangle numbers are meant to refer to the godly realm.
 - The first beast wore blasphemous names, like “god,” “lord,” and “saviour.” It is about a man who wants to be like god, to be God himself. It is the root of all sins that man wants to be like god.

²³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1028).

²⁴ Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993, p. 204).

²⁵ If ἀνθρώπου is generic, then the sense is, “It is [the] number of **humankind.**” It is significant that this construction fits Apollonius’ Canon (i.e., both the head noun and the genitive are anarthrous), suggesting that if one of these nouns is definite, the other is, too. Grammatically, those who contend that the sense is “it is [the] number of **a man**” have the burden of proof on them (for they treat the head noun, ἀριθμός, as definite and the genitive, ἀνθρώπου, as indefinite – the rarest of all possibilities). In the light of Johannine usage, we might also add Rev 16:18, where the Seer *clearly* uses the anarthrous ἀνθρώπος in a generic sense, meaning “humankind.” **The implications of this grammatical possibility, exegetically speaking, are simply that the number “666” is the number that represents humankind. Of course, an individual is in view, but his number may be the number representing all of humankind.** Thus the Seer might be suggesting here that the antichrist, who is the *best* representative of humanity without Christ (and the best counterfeit of a perfect man that his master, that old serpent, could muster), is still less than perfection (which would have been represented by the number seven).” (Wallace, D.B., 1996, p. 254)

- When we look back at the first encounter with the serpent and dragon in Genesis 3, we read: “The serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5).

Read also 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4: “Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”

Application

Before

- ❖ It is necessary to have a close look at the society.
 - What is the predominant religion?
 - What is the predominant ideology?
 - What is the main political power?
 - What is their stance against Christianity?
- ❖ Does the church suffer because of oppression, persecution, social and economic measures?
 - Is there freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to evangelize?

Revelation 13:11-18

- ❖ Praise Christ because he has received all authority in heaven and on earth (Rev 11:15; Mt:28:18).
- ❖ Christians need the wisdom to cope with oppression and persecution, together with endurance, faithfulness.
 - Jesus said: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28).
 - And: “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: **Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.**’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’” (Rev 14:12, 13).
- ❖ Today the mark (of the beast) can be anything used by a government to suppress any kind or form of religion, especially Christianity.
 - This can be the membership of a predominant political party or adhering to a state religion. Members receive all kinds of privileges. Non-members will be marginalized, oppressed, socially and economically, persecuted, and imprisoned.
- ❖ The number 666 is applicable to every situation in which a state, a government of a person acclaims godly stature and worship. It is the number of mankind striving for godly status.

Bibliography

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bauckham, R. (1993). *The climax of prophecy studies on the book of Revelation*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Beale, G. (1999). *The book of Revelation: A commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.

Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993). *A handbook on the Revelation to John*. New York: United Bible Societies.

Garrow, A. (1997). *Revelation*. London: Routledge.

Hemer, C. (2001). *The letters to the seven churches of Asia in their local setting*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.

Lausberg, H. (1998). *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric. A Foundation for Literary Study*. (Ed. D. F. Orton and R. D. Anderson). Leiden: Brill.

Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). *A Greek-English lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.). New York: United Bible Societies.

Osborne, G. (2002). *Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic.

Price, S. R. (2009). *Rituals and power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wallace, D. B. (1996). *Greek grammar beyond the basics: An exegetical syntax of the New Testament with scripture, subject, and Greek word indexes*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Walvoord, J. (1966). *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press.

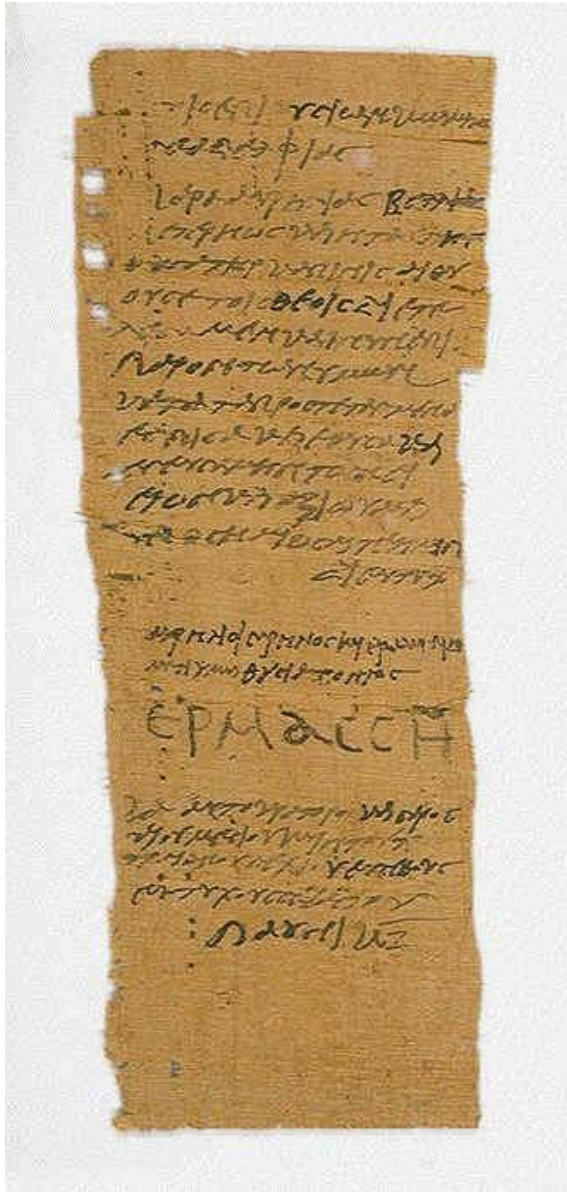


Figure 1A libellus from the Decian Persecution, A.D. 250.
See Persecution.