

Chapter 14

666: the Mark of the Beast

What number is more intriguing than 666? For those of us who like mental puzzles, this is among the best. Yet, this is not a game. Neither is it a vain pursuit. The book of Revelation instructs us: “Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast” (13:18).

Sadly, when it comes to wild ideas, it may be difficult to surpass the absurdities foisted on the public as solutions to the enigma of 666. Popular ultra-modern views include concepts of a cashless society, the universal use of bar codes, and the implantation of computer chips and biochips in each individual for identification and control. It is claimed that the Antichrist will control all commerce by such technology.

At the other extreme, many commentaries on Revelation assert that it is useless, foolish, or even dangerous to attempt to discover a specific name with a historical fulfillment of 666. They treat 666 and most items in Revelation as if they were parables devoid of specific predictions with historical significance.

It was no one less than Jesus Christ, the real author of Revelation, who directed John to write: “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the

beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666” (Rev. 13:18). We are commanded to “calculate” or “count,” as other versions translate it. We are dealing here with a mathematical computation. The Greek word means “count,” as illustrated in the only other text where it appears in the New Testament: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it”(Luke 14:28). This parable has a spiritual application, of course; but it is talking about a man counting his money.

Seldom does Revelation directly tell us to apply understanding to grasp the meaning of a particular symbol. It does not tell us to try to figure out who the lamb-like beast is. It does not tell us that if we have wisdom we can figure out the meaning of the third trumpet. However, when it mentions 666, it specifically tells us to calculate or count.

A Number is a Number

From ancient to modern times, numbers have fascinated both believers and unbelievers. Many people attribute mystical meanings or even mystical powers to numbers. Have you ever known people afraid of the number 13? Many people approach 666 with the same attitude—as if it were an unlucky, dangerous number. In contrast, the text of the Bible never gives mystical meanings to numbers; much less does it say they possess either evil or beneficial powers.

One of the earliest biblical prophetic interpretations was given by Joseph when he explained Pharaoh’s dreams. The number seven appears in this prophecy. What does it mean? Joseph told Pharaoh, “The seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine” (Gen. 41:27). Each empty head of grain represented a year of famine. What did seven represent? Seven! Throughout the explanation of these dreams, seven is seven.

Daniel wrote: “Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings” (7:17). Beasts represent kings, but four is four. In

the same chapter: “The ten horns are ten kings”(7:24). Horns, also, are kings but ten is ten.

Everyday English sometimes uses certain numbers in an indefinite way. Take, for example, “I told you a dozen times.” What does that mean? Exactly twelve? Not at all. An English dictionary gives the second meaning of “dozen” as “an indefinite number; a great many.”¹ In such cases, the number is not precise; nevertheless, it is still a question of quantity, of an unknown great number. Sometimes there is a round number. “I lived there ten years,” when really I only lived there a little over nine years. The round number is not precise; nevertheless, it is a number. It is a question of quantity, nothing more.

The same is true in the Bible, which often uses seven in the same way we frequently use dozen. Prov. 26:16 says a lazy man thinks he knows more than “seven men who can answer sensibly.” Who would argue that the lazy man thinks he is better than seven men, but not better than eight? No one. It is just a graphic way of saying “a lot.” It still stands for quantity, even if the quantity is indefinite.

Ezekiel received an important key to the interpretation of many prophecies involving time. God told the prophet: “Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it . . . then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year” (4:4, 6). Very interesting and important. Each prophetic day Ezekiel lay on his side represented a year in historical reality. “A day for each year.” However, the number in and of itself had no symbolism: forty was forty.

There simply is no hidden spiritual meaning in biblical numbers either inside or outside of prophetic texts. Contrary to what is often taught and accepted without examination, numbers are numbers in the Bible. There is absolutely no biblical basis for seeking some mystical meaning to 666, any more than for any other number. The Holy Spirit specifically commands us to calculate the number of the beast’s name. This is not a mystical enigma; it is a mathematical puzzle.

The Number of Man?

There is a view that Rev. 13:18 should not be translated “the number of a man,” but rather “the number of man” (without *a*). The reason given is that the indefinite article *a* is missing in the original. Of course, it is missing; Greek has no indefinite article. For this reason, we must examine the context to determine if the translation into English should include the indefinite article or not.

By translating the phrase “the number of man” (without *a*), the text is made to say that 666 is the number of the human race in general. If that is what the text is saying, there is nothing to calculate. If the text is simply using 666 as a mystical representation of the human race, the command to count is meaningless.

Besides saying “the number of a man” in verse 18, John spoke of “the number of his name” in verse 17. The beast’s name has a number. In addition, the beast in chapter 13 cannot be all mankind because he fights against much of mankind. For all these reasons, the number cannot have reference to humanity in general. Rather, we are commanded to calculate the number of the name of this specific enemy of mankind.

The common belief is that seven is the number of completeness, perfection, and God. It is believed that since six is less than seven, it is less than perfect, less than divine: it is the number of imperfect man. It is said that since six is repeated three times in the number 666, it refers to man at his worst in opposition to God.

Is six the number of humanity in contrast to the holy, perfect God, whose number is seven? Take, for example, the creation of the world; God completed it in six days. “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Gen. 1:31). Nothing incomplete here. God made it in six days and only rested on the seventh (Exod. 20:11; 31:17). Some say that six is the number of man inasmuch as man was created

on the sixth day of creation—so were baboons, bears, skunks, cats, and cobras!

The seraphim that praise God have six wings (Isa. 6:2) and so do the four living creatures in Rev. 4:8. Is six the number of man? On the contrary, it seems quite heavenly in these texts. The earthly tabernacle, which was a copy of heaven itself (Heb. 9:21-24), had six pieces of furniture—not seven. Thus, six is neither human nor imperfect; nor is it divine. Six is simply a number just like seven, eight, and nine.

Aside from all these thoughts, if we were to accept a translation that says “the number of man,” would Revelation then be affirming that six is the number of mankind? Not at all! Revelation 13 says absolutely nothing about six. Revelation 13 is talking about 666. Six hundred and sixty-six is not six. It is not even three sixes. Three sixes are eighteen. In 666, the first six means 600, the second six means 60, and only the third six means 6. The number 666 is not one less than 7. On the contrary, 666 is 659 more than 7.

The number in question is not 6; it is 666. Nor are we told to find a mystical meaning for 666. We are commanded to count or calculate.

How to Calculate

Rev. 13:18 directs us to “calculate the number of the beast.” It tells us the number is “the number of a man.” In verse 17 it speaks of “the number of his name.” The beast has a man’s name, and that name has a number. We could properly combine all these thoughts in the following manner: calculate the number of a man’s name.

In the English language, there is no such thing as a name having a number. In English, names are made up of letters of the alphabet. Numbers are made up of Arabic numerals: 1, 2, 3, etc. English letters have no numerical value; therefore, names in English have no number. To understand what Revelation is talking about, we must

transport ourselves to other cultures and languages where Arabic numerals do not exist.

Actually, our journey can start close to home. We still sometimes use Roman numerals, although not nearly as often as in years gone by. Most of us struggle to read the number MDCCLXXVI. It is 1776 in Roman numerals, where the letter *I* equals 1, *V* equals 5, *X* equals 10, *L* equals 50, *C* equals one hundred, *D* equals five hundred, and *M* equals one thousand. The Romans of old used only seven letters of their Latin alphabet to express numbers. The other letters had no numerical value. They did not have Arabic numerals. In Latin, the name David has a value of $500 + 0 + 5 + 1 + 500 = 1,006$. Thus, 1,006 is the number of the name David in the Roman numerals of Latin.

The Greeks, also without Arabic numerals, used individual letters of their alphabet to express values from 1 to 9, from 10 to 90 by tens, and from 100 to 900 by hundreds—a total of twenty-seven numbers to express any value from 1 to 999. They had to add three symbols to their twenty-four letter alphabet to complete the set of twenty-seven numbers. The Hebrews did a similar thing, but when they reached the end of their twenty-two letters, they simply stopped with the last letter, which had the value of 400. Thus, every word in these ancient languages could be considered to have a numerical value.

This method of calculating the numerical value of names was common among the ancients: Jews and Gentiles, Christians and pagans. For example:

The Egyptian mystics spoke of *Mercury*, or *Thouth*, under the number 1218, because the Greek letters composing the name Thouth, when estimated according to their numerical value, together made up that number.²

This can be done in any language that uses letters of the alphabet to signify numerical values. Latin, Greek, and Hebrew all use letters for numerical value. Therefore, the ancients would not have to ponder what was meant by

calculating the number of a name.

It is clear that in ancient languages the number of any name can easily be calculated. In addition, in any language with that system, it is obvious that *many* names can be found with the same value. There is not just one name with the numerical value of 666. A name with the value of 666 is only a part of the solution. Whatever name is found must fit into all the other circumstances predicted in Revelation.

In Which Language?

The next important question is this: In which language should we calculate? Sadly, this question is seldom asked. Commentaries offer calculations in whatever language each author desires, without giving any reason why that particular language is used.

Absurd calculations of 666 are often given using English. Some invent a system where *a* equals 1, *b* equals 2, etc. Others invent other systems. None of these systems has any value whatsoever. English letters have no numerical values. To assign them numerical values is arbitrary and fictional; it is a childish code game.

Surely the only languages to be given serious consideration are Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. These three were in existence when the Bible was written. The title on the cross was written in these three. The Bible itself was written in the first two. All three have a system of using letters to express numerical values.

A common solution proposed in Latin is *Vicarius Filii Dei*, "Vicar of the Son of God." It is said that since Daniel's fourth kingdom is the Roman-Latin empire, the language to use in the calculation is Latin. The idea is that we should expect the beast who imposes the mark to be identified by using his official language. This argument has some merit, but it likewise has problems. For example, the proposed title has questionable validity. Why? The title that Rome has used for centuries in reference to the popes is "Vicar of Christ" not "Vicar of the Son of God." There is considerable

historical question as to whether the term “Vicar of the Son of God” was ever used. This solution, therefore, is doubtful. In addition to this problem, it is noteworthy that although many Christians in the first six centuries believed the fourth beast was the Roman (Latin) Empire, yet there is no record of anyone searching in Latin for a solution to 666. They all searched in Greek.

The most popular solution in Hebrew today is based on the preterist belief that the first-century Emperor Nero was the Antichrist. The numerical value of his name, Nero Caesar, is 666 in the Hebrew alphabet. Preterism says that since Revelation makes much use of Hebrew symbols and words and was written by a Jewish Christian, the solution to 666 would naturally be found in the Hebrew language. Preterism also argues that the prophecies of Revelation had to have meaning for, and be understood by, the people to whom the book was written in the first century. In opposition to these arguments stands the clear testimony of history: the idea that 666 represents Nero does not appear in any known writing prior to the nineteenth century! This fact alone contradicts a major argument in defense of the preterist position: namely, that the prophecy should be understood by the people to whom it was written. If that were so, why did it take eighteen hundred years for someone to discover that Nero’s name equals 666?

When discussing the idea of Nero being the solution to 666, the well-known church historian Philip Schaff wrote:

It seems incredible that such an easy solution of the problem should have remained unknown for eighteen centuries and been reserved for the wits of half a dozen rival rationalists in Germany.³

Schaff is saying that it was rationalists who first proposed Nero as a solution to 666. Rationalists believe reason, not revelation, is the source of truth; therefore, they attempt to empty the Bible of miracles and prophecy. In this case, a rationalist is satisfied that he has emptied Revelation of

predictive prophecy by selecting Nero, who was not future to the book of Revelation.

Greek is the Language

In contrast to Latin and Hebrew, compelling arguments can be made for using the Greek language to arrive at the meaning of 666. In the first place, the book of Revelation was written in Greek. Students of the Bible and history have often noted that one reason the world was ready for the gospel in the first century is that a universal language, Greek, was in place. This made it much easier to spread the Scriptures everywhere. The Old Testament had already been translated from Hebrew into Greek (the Septuagint), so that it, too, was available both to Jews who no longer read Hebrew and to the population at large. Since Revelation was originally written to Greek-speaking people, a solution in Greek is by far the most natural.

Jesus told us to calculate the number of a name. The most natural thing is to make the calculation in the language that tells us to do so. The Greeks could write out numbers in two ways. They could use words equivalent to our “six hundred and sixty-six.” They could also use the only system they had for expressing numerals, the letters of the alphabet: one letter for 600, one letter for 60, and one letter for 6. Using this method, like our Arabic numerals, the Greeks just needed three Greek letters to write 666. Interestingly, that is exactly the way 666 appears in many Greek manuscripts. These Greek texts read $\chi\xi\varsigma'$: 666.⁴ Thus, not only is the enigma expressed in the Greek language, but many Greek manuscripts give the key for calculating the number of the name by using the numerical value of the Greek letters.

This is not the only special use of the Greek alphabet found in the book of Revelation. Like Isaiah, Revelation teaches that the Father and the Son are “the First and the Last” Isa. 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:11, 17; 2:8; 22:13). Deity is called “the Beginning and the End” three times in Revelation

(Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). In addition, Deity is called “the Alpha and the Omega” in four of the six Revelation texts just cited. *Alpha* (Α, α) and *omega* (Ω, ω) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (shown in upper and lower case).

It is the Greek alphabet that is used to express the eternity of Jesus, not the Hebrew or Latin alphabets. In Revelation, Jesus is not the *aleph* and the *tau*, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Jesus is not the *a* and the *z*, the first and last letters of the Latin alphabet at the time of John. No, Jesus is the *alpha* and the *omega*, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Revelation uses these Greek letters four times to express the eternity of the Father and the Son.

Early Christian writers who spoke of the matter unanimously used the Greek language to decipher 666. E. B. Elliott, in his very extensive and scholarly commentary on Revelation written in the middle of the nineteenth century, wrote that he was not aware of any writer in the first six centuries using anything but the Greek language in their attempts to solve 666.⁵

In summary, the strongest arguments are in favor of using the Greek language to decipher the alphabetical symbolism of 666:

1. Revelation was written in Greek.
2. 666 is written in many manuscripts using three Greek letters as digits.
3. The eternal nature of Jesus and the Father is symbolically expressed in Revelation using letters of the Greek alphabet.
4. As far as existing records indicate, writers of the first six centuries unanimously used Greek to decipher 666.

Best Solution

Inasmuch as the beasts of Revelation 13 are related to Rome, we would likewise expect “the mark or the name of the beast” and the “number of his name” to be related to Rome. Most people today assume, with little study, that the

mark 666 relates to end times. However, since the Roman Empire was established over two thousand years ago, there is a vast amount of history to consider before a person even begins to think of future possibilities.

As early as the second century, Irenaeus (A.D. 130 to 202) searched seriously for Greek names with the numerical value of 666. Although Irenaeus knew that many Greek names had that value, he did not consider it useless to seek the one name that fulfilled all aspects of the prophecy. On the contrary, he stressed the need to learn the name in order to be forewarned. He realized that the name must harmonize with the rest of the prophecy. He said the prophecies could not be fulfilled until the Roman Empire was broken into ten parts:

The number of the name of the beast, [if reckoned] according to the Greek mode of calculation by the [value of] the letters contained in it, will amount to six hundred and sixty and six . . . let them await, in the first place, the division of the kingdom into ten . . . many names can be found possessing the number mentioned . . . Then also *Lateinos* (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: I will not, however, make any boast over this [coincidence] . . . he [John] indicates the number of the name now, that when this man comes we may avoid him.⁶

Irenaeus understood that he himself lived during the fourth kingdom predicted by Daniel. He connected this kingdom to the beasts of Revelation 13 and 17. He also recognized that there were events still in his future, such as the division of the Roman Empire into ten parts. As Rev. 17:12 says: “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet.” A century after John penned those words, Irenaeus understood it was still true that the ten kings had “received no kingdom as yet.” He also understood an enemy of God would come sometime following

the ten-fold division, and he saw that the number of this wicked one's name would equal 666.

Irenaeus lived during a part of the fulfillment of Revelation 13 but before the fulfillment of other parts. Situated in that historical context, he found it significant that the name of the kingdom then in power had the value of 666 in Greek. He did not claim that *Lateinos* was the definite solution to 666, but only a possibility. It was too early in time for him to be definitive. Today, however, with centuries of history behind us, we have the advantage over Irenaeus. From our historical perspective, many of us believe that there never has been a better solution to 666 than this one that Irenaeus suggested a mere one hundred years after John wrote Revelation.

Inasmuch as Irenaeus wrote in the Greek language, he took it for granted that his readers could check out his calculations with utmost ease; thus, he does not even mention the value of the individual letters. For those of us unacquainted with Greek, it is helpful and interesting to see the specifics that are detailed in the accompanying chart.

The numerical value is only one aspect. The name *Lateinos* fits the other aspects of Revelation 13 as well. In Chapter 10, "Why Rome?" we considered the evidence found in Daniel that the beasts of Revelation are related to Rome. The name *Lateinos* agrees with and further confirms that conclusion. *Latinus* (the Latin spelling) was the reputed founder of the Latin race; thus, we have the name of an individual man. Even if history cannot conclusively prove he was the father of the race, nevertheless, it is widely known that *Latin* is a designation of a people, a kingdom, individuals in that kingdom, a language, and a church. The ancient Latins lived in the central part of Italy called Latium. Latin was the language of the city of Rome from its founding, and it later became the official language of the Roman Empire.

The Latin Church

Irenaeus wrote: "The Latins are they who at present bear rule."⁷ He equated those rulers with the fourth beast of

DECIPHERING "666"

Revelation says: "the number of his name . . . calculate the number" (13:17-18). Revelation was written in Greek. Each Greek letter has a numerical value. Therefore, it is simple to calculate the number of any name in Greek. The difficult part is finding a name that harmonizes with the other details predicted in Revelation 13. There is no better solution than the following one suggested by Irenaeus, who lived in the second century:

Greek Numerical System

English equivalent	Greek upper & lower case		Value
a	Α	α	1
b	Β	β	2
g	Γ	γ	3
d	Δ	δ	4
e	Ε	ε	5
		ς	6
z	Ζ	ζ	7
e	Η	η	8
th	Θ	θ	9
i	Ι	ι	10
k	Κ	κ	20
l	Λ	λ	30
m	Μ	μ	40
n	Ν	ν	50
x	Ξ	ξ	60
o	Ο	ο	70
p	Π	π	80
		ρ	90
r	Ρ	ρ	100
s	Σ	σ,ς	200
t	Τ	τ	300
u	Υ	υ	400
ph	Φ	φ	500
ch	Χ	χ	600
ps	Ψ	ψ	700
o	Ω	ω	800
		ϗ	900

The number of
LATEINOS
is 666.

L	Λ	=	30
a	α	=	1
t	τ	=	300
e	ε	=	5
i	ι	=	10
n	ν	=	50
o	ο	=	70
s	ς	=	<u>200</u>
total		=	666

Latinus (Greek: Lateinos)

Latinus was the reputed founder of the Latins. The Latins were the majority of the population of Rome from its foundation. Latin became the official language of the Roman Empire and later the official language of the Roman Catholic Church.

Daniel and the ten-horned beasts of Revelation 13 and 17. That much was clear to him, but Irenaeus had no way of knowing that the Latin Empire would one day develop into the Latin Church. *Latin* is a most appropriate designation for this later development of the Roman power. For over fifteen hundred years, Latin has been a distinguishing mark of the Catholic Church. *Roman* and *Latin* are two ways of identifying the same thing. *Roman* identifies the location; *Latin*, the language.

When Imperial Rome fell in A.D. 476, the empire continued in the East with Constantinople as its capital. Some designate this part of the breakup “the Eastern Roman Empire.” Others more correctly call it the “Byzantine Empire.” Rome was *West* and Latin; Constantinople was *East* and Greek. This division was mirrored in the churches. The eastern churches were orthodox and Greek; the western churches, catholic and Latin.

Even before the fall of Rome, Latin had become the ritual language of the Western Church regardless of the fact that much of the empire was not of Roman heritage. As the centuries went by, the peoples of Europe gradually changed from Latin to new languages: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, and English. Despite these changes, Latin remained the language of the Catholic Church: both the official language and the language of worship. Latin continued as the language of worship until the middle of the twentieth century when the Second Vatican Council ruled that other languages could be used. Those of us born before the nineteen-sixties can well remember the time when mass was said only in Latin. The common people throughout the entire world would go to mass and not understand what the priest was saying.

Century after century, the Catholic Church worldwide was the Latin Church. As of the twenty-first century, Latin continues to be the official language of the Catholic Church, although in decline. Priests must still study Latin in preparation for the priesthood. Official documents of the Catholic

Church continue to be published in Latin. The Catholic Church considers Latin to be an instrument for the unity of the church worldwide, tying all churches to Rome.

The *Modern Catholic Dictionary* defines “Roman Catholicism” as: “The faith, worship, and practice of all Christians in communion with the Bishop of Rome, whom they acknowledge as the Vicar of Christ and the visible head of the Church founded by Christ.”⁸ This church is Roman because Rome rules supreme over it.

Under the Pope in Rome is the Roman Curia. The Roman Curia is “the whole ensemble of administrative and judicial offices through which the Pope directs the operations of the Catholic Church.”⁹ “Curia” is a Latin word that in ancient times referred to Roman councils, the Senate, and the various government offices in the Roman Empire. The Catholic Church has retained both the name and the form of government of Imperial Rome.

The special garments that today’s Catholic priests wear during mass are copies of various types of clothing that were worn in the Roman Empire in the second century. Today, instead of wearing clothing typical of the nation in which the mass is being celebrated, the priests wear ancient Roman clothing.

John Paul I died suddenly, a scant thirty-three days after his election. That he was Italian was to be expected. All popes before him for the previous 455 years had been Italian. What was not at all expected following his sudden death was that the assembled cardinals would elect a non-Italian, the first Polish pope ever, John Paul II. It is well known that the majority of popes throughout history have been Italian. In the three centuries from A.D. 752 to 1046, there were 57 popes. Not only were most of them Italian, seventy-two percent of them were born in the Italian capital, Rome!¹⁰

The Greek name *Lateinos* has a numerical value of 666. The empire that ruled when the church started was the Latin Empire. The church that gradually turned from the truth and became powerful upon the ashes of that empire

was the Latin Church. Latin was the only language of worship until very recent times, and Latin remains the official language of the Catholic Church. The Latin Curia, under the (usually) Italian pope and in the ancient Latin capital remains the center of power of the church. It is the Roman Church; it is the Latin Church.

The Nature of the Mark

“He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads” (Rev. 13:16). All interpretive views agree that the beast is not a four-footed wild mammal but rather is symbolic of some great satanic power among men. The number also must be symbolic inasmuch as we are told to “calculate the number of the beast.” We have to do a calculation to understand the symbol. Rev. 13:7 speaks of “one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” The mark, the name, or the number. Since the number is symbolic, the mark would also seem to be symbolic. There is no necessity of envisioning people literally having the number 666 stamped on their right hands or foreheads.

Behind the forehead is the brain, the mind; the hand is the action member of the body. The symbolism seems to contemplate the ability to think and the ability to do. It is a matter of belief and action. The mark is a representation of those who have yielded their minds and bodies into the service of the beast, of those who accept the teachings and obey the commands of the beast; they worship the beast.

This symbolism is very much like the symbolism used for the people of God. In Rev. 7:3, the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads, while in 22:4 God’s children have His name on their foreheads. As early as Deut. 6:8, similar symbolism is recorded involving the forehead and the hand. Referring to the words of God, Moses commanded the Israelites: “You shall bind them [God’s words] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” This is the context Jesus quoted when proclaiming the greatest

commandment of the law: loving God (Matt. 22:36-38). Loving God involves the mind and the hand; it involves what we believe and what we do. Worshipping the beast likewise involves what one believes and what one does.

Some believers are not satisfied with this symbolic interpretation and look to a more literal fulfillment. It is noteworthy that Catholics do literally “receive a mark . . . on their foreheads,” not once but several times during their life. Instead of immersion in water at baptism, water is poured on the forehead and the sign of the cross is made on the forehead. At confirmation, the forehead is anointed with oil in the form of a cross. On Ash Wednesday, Catholics have ashes placed on their foreheads. The making of the “sign of the cross,” which devout Catholics repeatedly practice, is begun with the right hand touching the forehead. The most remarkable of these is the importance of marking the forehead at baptism, inasmuch as this is the sacrament that makes an individual a Catholic.

“No One May Buy or Sell”

Of the lamb-like beast, Revelation says:

He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name (13:16-17).

Present-day fascination with 666 often restricts “the mark” to the prediction of not being able to buy or sell. Yet, just one verse earlier, there is a far more drastic statement. The lamb-like beast will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (13:15). Worship the image or die.

The prophecy speaks of control over commerce and control over life, but it also has to do with one’s worship. The world has seen much of this kind of persecution. However, this particular persecution has to be considered in the

setting of Revelation 13, which deals with the revival of Rome as a religious power. With this setting in mind, it becomes rather obvious that the focus is upon such historical realities as the Crusades and the Inquisition. The spirit and practice of the Inquisition spanned at least the twelfth to the nineteenth century. Since we live in an age and country with religious freedom today, it may be difficult for us to imagine the centuries during which the Roman Catholic Church held sway over the souls and bodies of men.

According to Catholic authorities, the Inquisition had as its purpose:

To discover and suppress heresy and to punish heretics . . . the relapsed heretics who were found guilty were turned over to the civil government . . . The fact that secular law prescribed death must be understood in the light of those days when heresy was anarchy and treason.¹¹

Exactly. In those days, any view opposed to the teaching of Rome was treason that was worthy of death, exactly as predicted by Christ in Revelation. Furthermore, torture was freely used to elicit confessions. According to the *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, punishments of those who refused to recant could include execution by burning or strangling, exile, short imprisonment, perpetual imprisonment, and confiscation of property.¹²

The papacy on the one hand, and the secular arm on the other, correspond very well to the second and first beasts of Revelation 13. The first beast, by connection to Daniel, surely represents the civil Roman power, while the lamb-like beast, which “exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence” (13:12), surely corresponds to the papacy headquartered in Rome.

Those who did not worship according to the dictates of Rome were subject to death. This is clear in these prophecies, just as the fulfillment is clear in all the history books telling about those times.

Economic repression was also present as was prophesied:

“No one may buy or sell except one who has the mark.” The article cited in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* speaks of the confiscation of property, and says that seizure was allowed even of property that an innocent person had inherited from someone who was not declared to be a heretic until after death. It further states: “Any contract entered into with a heretic was void in itself.”¹³

Speaking of Canon 27 of the Third Lateran Council held in 1179, a Catholic authority writes:

There is a long and very detailed decree about the restraint of heretics . . . Both the heretics and those who protect them are excommunicated; no one is to give them shelter, or allow them in his territory, or to do business with them.¹⁴

Here is an official law of the Catholic Church—no one was “to do business with” those whom the Catholic Church considered heretics. What a precise fulfillment of the prophecy: “No one may buy or sell except one who has the mark”! The fear of 666 is not something for the future; it is history. Give thanks to God that we did not live in those days!

Sidestepping the Obvious

Educated futurists are well aware of the basic outline, if not the details, of the historical facts alluded to in this chapter. Tim LaHaye, for example, makes numerous revealing references to the Catholic Church in his Revelation commentary. For instance, he writes:

Both the fifth seal and Revelation 20:4 indicate that a martyrdom of true believers will exceed even that of the Dark Ages, when the Roman Catholic Church persecuted those who held to a personal faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁵

When the Babylonian influence of the Church was greatest during the Dark Ages, millions of Christians were persecuted to death. This period of history is well named the “Inquisition.”¹⁶

In his attempt to picture how terrible he thinks future

events will be, he has called up the witness of history regarding the deadly work of the Church of Rome in the Middle or Dark Ages.

When discussing Revelation 17, LaHaye argues against the seven hills being an indication of the city of Rome, and he claims the seventh head of the beast is “Antichrist at the end of time.”¹⁷ In spite of his denial of this prophecy already being fulfilled, he proceeds to fill several pages with evidence of the relationship between Revelation 17 and the Church of Rome:

The long history of Rome’s intolerance and persecution of Christians . . . Whenever in control of a country, Rome has not hesitated to put to death all who opposed her.¹⁸

He follows with a two-and-one-half page quote from *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, full of details of the Inquisition.

With all this evidence, it is a shame to sidestep historical reality in favor of futuristic fiction. All a Christian needs to do is carefully compare 2 Thessalonians 2, Daniel 7, and Revelation 13 and 17 with the facts of history. History shows that the prophesied Roman enemy of God arrived on the scene centuries ago. Perhaps many miss this truth due to the fact that today the beast does not wield nearly as much power as it did in centuries gone by. Therefore, Christians need to dust off their history books and investigate what things were really like in the Middle Ages.

Why Was Revelation Written?

Revelation was written to prepare the people of God for the spiritual battles in this present life, before Jesus returns. It was written to give us God’s view of the religious situation today and throughout history. It was written to warn, prepare, and strengthen the church for the real battles of this present life. It was not written to entertain the church regarding future events that the church would never experience.

The Antichrist is not future. The little horn of Daniel 7 is

not future. The beasts of Revelation 13 and 17 are not future. These are all past and present reality. They are only future to the extent they continue to exist. To push these prophecies totally into our future after the church has been raptured from this world is to act like the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand. We need to come to grips with the historical past and the present religious reality, as unpleasant and unpopular as that might be. We need to look at the past and present through the eyes of the Lamb of God, the real author of the book of Revelation. "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3).

Notes:

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, "dozen."
2. E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, fifth edition, vol. 3 (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1862), 242.
3. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, third edition, vol. 1 (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 847.
4. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Revelation* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949), 335.
5. E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, vol. 3, 246.
6. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5.30.1-4.
7. *Ibid.*, 5.30.3.
8. John A. Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 472.
9. *Ibid.*, 141.
10. Felician A. Foy, editor, *1980 Catholic Almanac* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1979), 170-71.
11. Hardon, *Catholic Dictionary*, 280.
12. "Inquisition," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Handy Volume Issue, eleventh edition, vol. XIV (New York: The Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, 1910), 587-596.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Mgr. Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils: 325-1870*, with the *Imprimatur* of Cardinal Spellman (Internet: available on various Catholic sites, 1960, for example: <http://65.108.168.229/Lateran%201179.htm>), Chapter 11, "The Third General Council of the Lateran, 1179."

15. Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 226.
16. *Ibid.*, 236.
17. *Ibid.*, 262.
18. *Ibid.*, 272.

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THIS CHAPTER TAKEN FROM COMPLETE BOOK:

Nobody Left Behind: Insight into 'End-Time' Prophecies

INFORMATION ON COMPLETE BOOK:

<http://www.nobodyleftbehind.net>

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