



Biblical Misconceptions: 666

Several years ago I was paying for a purchase at a local store and the charge rang up to \$6.66. The cashier looked at me with a strange look and then gave me an extra penny, explaining that they did not like the number. I replied that it was alright with me and explained the need not to fear the number **666**. Each year for Halloween there will inevitably be many plays on the number as it is associated with evil. For those who subscribe to the premillennial doctrine this number represents the antichrist and is avoided. This leads to a discussion of a biblical misconception that has made it's way into mainstream thinking and has produced a number of films and books about the diabolical antichrist and his world domination. John refers to the "*beast*" in **Revelation 13.18**. "*Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.*" The first thing we may notice is that this is a singular individual "*a man*". Secondly, the term antichrist is not found in the book of Revelation. Thirdly, as was pointed out last week, the antichrist spoken of by John in his earlier writings, was present in the first century and there were many antichrists (**1 John 2.18**) and this "antichrist" represented a spirit of error concerning Christ (**1 John 4.3**). Since John, writing by divine inspiration, had mentioned the antichrist, or the spirit of antichrist, it would seem logical that he would include this term in Revelation in speaking of this man who was so identified. He does not. The book of Revelation is written in signs, or symbols, which makes these difficult to understand, but contains information about things that were to "shortly" come to pass (**Rev 1.1, 22.6**). That being the case then we must look at the number 666 as being symbolic as well. This man, represented by the beast, was to have the ability to deceive through lying wonders (**Rev 13.14**). What then is the reason for the number? One way of viewing it is to compare with other numbers used in the Bible. Three principal numbers are used to signify the working of God. These are the numbers one, three and seven.

Seven in the scriptures is understood to denote completion, or fullness of God's work and power. It is interesting that these three numbers, 666, are very close to the number 7. We find that Christ warned about false Christ's and prophets (**Matt 24.24**) and the scriptures are filled with warnings concerning those who would deceive and lead others astray. The combined ability to appear to have the power of God as well as persecuting Christians appears to denote the presence of a powerful and convincing lie used to suppress the truth. Paul the apostle warned of a falling away (**2 Thess 2.3**) and continues in the letter to describe the characteristics of this. What better way to deceive than to teach things that are close to the revealed truth but not close enough to lead one to salvation. The "man" of Revelation 13 may indeed be symbolic of an individual who is succeeded by others like him and thus perpetuates the deception and distortion of God's truth so that souls will be lost. Paul states that this is possible because those deceived would not receive the love of the truth but believe a lie (**2 Thess 2.10-12**). The number itself may well indicate that we should fear deception. How do we avoid being fooled? The answer to this lies in a desire to know the truth and be right in the sight of God. The world is filled with mistaken truth and doctrines that may have some basis in the scriptures but lack the true power of God to save by teaching partial truths, or, by eliminating essential elements of the doctrine that is present in the scriptures. The man of Revelation 13 rises out of the power that is destroyed and yet preserved in an altered form. The book of Revelation deals with the persecution of Christians, a practice that began in the first century and continued for some time until the rise of a new power that eventually gave birth to other deceptions. We need not fear the number 666, but we need to fear being fooled and ultimately lost eternally.

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