

Biblical Misconceptions: 666

I've had experiences while paying for something where either the sale amount or change due came up to \$6.66. Cashiers have given me a strange look and changed the amount by a penny or so, explaining that they're afraid of the number and wanted to change it. I like to use that moment to explain why the number isn't one to be feared but I probably don't make a big impact on the superstition. But I try. Around Halloween the number, associated with evil, gets a lot of usage in various ways. For those who subscribe to the Premillennial doctrine, this number stands for the Antichrist and has been interpreted as appearing in different forms including data systems and government identification as a sign of the end times. **Concern over 666 and the resulting fear is another biblical misconception that's become embedded in mainstream thinking.**

This idea comes from the book of Revelation in which John writes, "***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.***" (Revelation 13.18). The first thing to note is that this is a singular individual, a man. Secondly, although the image of the beast is associated with a man, and represented by the number 666, he isn't referred to as the Antichrist. As a matter of fact, the term antichrist isn't found in the book of Revelation at all. So, we're talking about a man, identified as the beast, not the Antichrist, represented by the number 666. The beast is associated with the influence of Satan in Revelation so is the number a figure for Satan. A deeper look at numbers used in the Bible supplies a practical answer to this question.

Revelation contains prophecies expressed in signs or symbolic language and are difficult to understand. The context of the book limits the time in which the prophecies were to be fulfilled stating they were to "***shortly come to pass***" (Rev 1.1), or "***shortly be done***" (Rev 22.6). As with other images in the book, we have to treat the number 666 symbolically as well. A key to understanding the number is in the behavior of the beast-man. This man would have the ability to deceive through lying wonders (Rev 13.14). What then is the reason for the number? We can answer that by looking at numbers used by God in the Bible that have a powerful symbolic presence.

Three principal numbers are used to signify the identity, power and work of God. These numbers are one, three and seven. Seven in the scriptures is understood to denote completion, perfection and the fullness of God's work and power. The number three is used to represent the godhead, the work of God and fulfillment of his work. The number one is used to represent the singularity of God's presence, truth, revelation, purpose and power.

The three numbers, 666, representing an agent of Satan, having the power to deceive, is significant. We have the number 6, which is one digit away from 7, repeated 3 times. The repetition of this number, and the attribute of deception on the part of the beast-man, implies that he'll be able to convince people that he's the power and truth of God when in reality he's a deceiver working to destroy souls.

Christ stated, '***For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.***'"

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(**Matt 24.24**). The scriptures contain a number of warnings about deceivers and false teachers who would lead others astray. In Revelation, the combined attributes of appearing to have the power of God as well as persecuting Christians, indicates the presence of a powerful and convincing lie used to suppress the truth. Paul the apostle warned of a falling away, or apostasy in the church, and it's characteristics that mirror the presence of such a distortion of truth (**2 Thess 2.1-12**).

What better way to deceive than to teach things that are close to revealed truth, but not close enough to lead one to salvation. The beast-man of **Revelation 13** may indeed be symbolic of an individual who will be succeeded by others like him, perpetuating deception and manipulation of God's truth, causing souls to be lost. Paul states this would be possible because those deceived wouldn't receive the love of the truth but would accept and believe a lie (**2 Thess 2.10-12**).

The number should be understood as a warning about deception, not the presence of a demonic leader who'll take control of the world. We can avoid that by cultivating a desire to know the truth that's found in the scriptures. The world is filled with doctrines that have some basis in the scriptures but lack the true power of God to save by teaching partial truths and eliminating essential elements of the doctrine that's present in the scriptures. We don't need to be afraid of the number 666, but we do need to fear being fooled spiritually and lost eternally.