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Number of the beast

The **number of the beast** (Koinē Greek: Ἀριθμὸς τοῦ θηρίου, *Arithmós tou̯ thēriou*) is associated with the Beast of Revelation in chapter 13, verse 18 of the Book of Revelation. In most manuscripts of the New Testament and in English translations of the Bible, the number of the beast is **six hundred sixty-six** or χξς (in Greek numerals, χ represents 600, ξ represents 60 and ς represents 6).^[1] Papyrus 115 (which is the oldest preserved manuscript of the *Revelation* as of 2017), as well as other ancient sources like *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus*, give the number of the beast as χις or χις, transliterable in Arabic numerals as **616** (χις), not 666;^{[2][3]} critical editions of the Greek text, such as the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, note χις as a variant.^[4]



The number of the beast is 666 by William Blake

In the Bible

χξς

The number of the beast is described in Revelation 13:15–18. Several translations have been interpreted for the meaning of the phrase "Here is Wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast..." where the peculiar Greek word ψηφισάτω (*psephisato*) is used. Possible translations include "to count", "to reckon" and also "to vote" or "to decide".^[5]

In the *Textus Receptus*, derived from Byzantine text-type manuscripts, the number six hundred sixty-six is represented by the Greek numerals χξς,^{[6][7]} with the Greek letter stigma (ς) representing the number 6:

¹⁷καὶ ἵνα μὴ τις δύνηται ἀγοράσαι ἢ πωλῆσαι εἰ μὴ ὁ ἔχων τὸ χάραγμα, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου ἢ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ. ¹⁸Ὡδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν· ὁ ἔχων τὸν νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου· ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστί· καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ χξς'.^[8]

ENGLISH

¹⁷And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. ¹⁸Here 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 **666**."

In several editions of the Greek Bible, the number is represented by the final three words, **ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ**, *hexakósioi hexēkonta héx*, meaning "six hundred [and] sixty-six":^{[9][10]}

¹⁷καὶ ἵνα μὴ τις δύνηται ἀγοράσαι ἢ πωλῆσαι εἰ μὴ ὁ ἔχων τὸ χάραγμα, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου ἢ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ. ¹⁸Ὡδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν· ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου, ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν· καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ **ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ**.^[11]

ENGLISH

"¹⁷And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. ¹⁸Here 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 and sixty-six**."

Revelation 13:18 states that if one is wise and has an understanding to count the number of the beast, which is also the number of a man, the number comes to 666.

ΧΙΣ

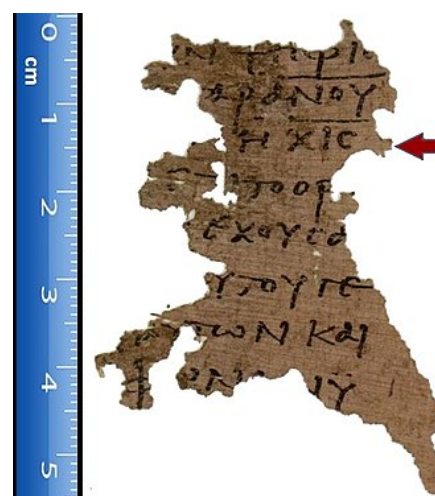
Although Irenaeus (2nd century AD) affirmed the number to be 666 and reported several scribal errors of the number, theologians have doubts about the traditional reading^[12] because of the appearance of the figure 616 in the *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus* (C; Paris—one of the four great uncial codices), as well as in the Latin version of Tyconius (*DCXVI*, ed. Souter in the *Journal of Theology*, SE, April 1913), and in an ancient Armenian version (ed. Conybeare, 1907). Irenaeus knew about the 616 reading, but did not adopt it (*Haer.* V, 30) noting instead that those who spoke with the Apostle John "face to face" said that the number was 666.^[13] In the 380s, correcting the existing Latin-language version of the New Testament (commonly referred to as the *Vetus Latina*), Jerome retained "666".^{[14][15]}

Around 2005, a fragment from Papyrus 115, taken from the Oxyrhynchus site, was discovered at the University of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum. It gave the beast's number as 616 (ΧΙΣ). This fragment is the oldest manuscript (about 1,700 years old) of Revelation 13 found as of 2017.^{[2][3]} *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus*, known before the *Papyrus 115* finding but dating to after it, has 616 written in full: ἑξακόσιοι δέκα ἕξ, *hexakosioi deka hex* (lit. "six hundred and sixteen").^[17]

Papyrus 115 and *Ephraemi Rescriptus* have led some scholars to regard 616 as the original number of the beast.^[18] According to Paul Louis, "The number 666 has been substituted for 616 either by analogy with 888, the [Greek] number of Jesus (Gustav Adolf Deissmann), or because it is a triangular number, the sum of the first 36 numbers (1+2+3+4+5+6+...+36 = 666)".^[19]

Interpretations

The beast's identity and the beast's number are usually interpreted by applying one of three methods:^{[20]:718}



Fragment from Papyrus 115 (P115) of *Revelation* in the 66th vol. of the Oxyrhynchus series (P. Oxy. 4499).^[16] Has the *number of the beast* as χις, 616.

1. Using gematria to find the numbers that equate to the names of world leaders, to check for a match with the scriptural number.
2. Treating the number of the beast as a duration of time.
3. Linking the scriptural imagery and symbolism of the Antichrist with characteristics of world leaders who oppose Christianity.

Identification by gematria

In Greek isopsephy and Hebrew gematria, every letter has a corresponding numeric value. Summing these numbers gives a numeric value to a word or name. The use of isopsephy to calculate "the number of the beast" is used in many of the below interpretations.

Nero



Bust of Nero at Musei Capitolini, Rome

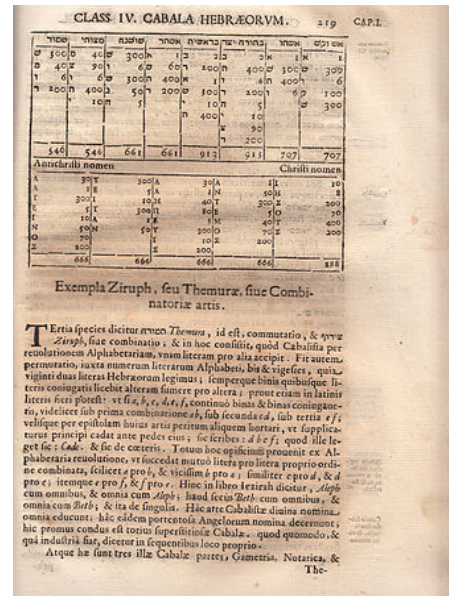
Since 1830s, theologians like Christian Friedrich Fritzsche, Franz Ferdinand Benary, Ferdinand Hitzig and Eduard Reuss pointed the number 666 to Nero, who was the first emperor to have persecuted Christians.^[21] Preterist theologians typically support the interpretation that 666 is the numerical equivalent of the name and title Nero Caesar (Roman

Emperor 54–68 AD).^{[22][23][24][25][26][27][28]} Written in Aramaic, this can be valued at 666 using the Hebrew numerology of gematria, and was used to secretly speak against the emperor. Additionally, "Nero Caesar" in the Hebrew alphabet is נרון קסר *NRON QSR*, which when interpreted

numerically represents the numbers 50 200 6 50 100 60 200, which add up to 666. Though this has been disputed by some who note that the second Nun is in its final form (sofit) and thereby the value would be 700 instead of 50 which would make Caesar's name add to 1316 instead of 666.^[29]

The Greek term χάραγμα (**charagma**, "mark" in Revelation 13:16) was most commonly used for imprints on documents or coins. Charagma is well attested to have been an imperial seal of the Roman Empire used on official documents during the 1st and 2nd centuries.^[30] In the reign of Emperor Decius (249–251 AD), those who did not possess the certificate of sacrifice (*libellus*) to Caesar could not pursue trades, a prohibition that conceivably goes back to Nero, reminding one of Revelation 13:17.^[31]

Preterists argue that Revelation was written before the destruction of the Temple, with Nero exiling John to Patmos.^[32] Most scholars, however, argue it was written after Nero committed suicide in



AD 68. *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia* has noted that Revelation was "written during the latter part of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, probably in A.D. 95 or 96".^[33] Additional Protestant scholars are in agreement.^[a]

Because some people believe Revelation 13 speaks of a future prophetic event, "All who dwell on the earth *will* worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Revelation 13:8 NKJV), some have argued that the interpretation of Nero meeting the fulfillment is an impossibility if Revelation was written around 30 years *after* the death of Nero.^{[b][36][37]} However, rumors circulated that Nero had not really died and would return to power.^[38]

It has also been suggested that the numerical reference to Nero was a code to imply but not directly identify emperor Domitian,^{[39][40]} whose style of rulership resembled that of Nero, who heavily taxed the people of Asia (Lydia), to whom the Book of Revelation was primarily addressed.^[41] The popular Nero Redivivus legend stating that Nero would return to life can also be noted; "After Nero's suicide in AD 68, there was a widespread belief, especially in the eastern provinces, that he was not dead and somehow would return.^[42] Suetonius (XL) relates how court astrologers had predicted Nero's fall but that he would have power in the east. And, indeed, at least three false claimants did present themselves as Nero *redivivus* (resurrected).^[43]

An Aramaic scroll from Wadi Murabba'at, dated to "the second year of Emperor Nero", refers to him by his name and title.^[44] In Hebrew it is *Nron Qsr* (pronounced "Nerōn Kaisar"). In Latin it is *Nro Qsr* (pronounced "Nerō Kaisar").

Nron Qsr

The Greek version of the name and title transliterates into Hebrew as גרון קסר, and yields a numerical value of 666,^[44] as shown:

<i>Resh</i> (ר)	<i>Samekh</i> (ס)	<i>Qoph</i> (ק)	<i>Nun</i> (נ)	<i>Vav</i> (ו)	<i>Resh</i> (ר)	<i>Nun</i> (נ)	Sum
200	60	100	50	6	200	50	666

Nro Qsr

The Latin version of the name drops the second Nun (נ), so that it appears as *Nro* and transliterates into Hebrew as גרו קסר, yielding 616:^[22]

<i>Resh</i> (ר)	<i>Samekh</i> (ס)	<i>Qoph</i> (ק)	<i>Vav</i> (ו)	<i>Resh</i> (ר)	<i>Nun</i> (נ)	Sum
200	60	100	6	200	50	616

Muhammad

Gematria has also been used with the word *Maometis* (Ancient Greek: Μαομέτις); which scholars have described as a dubiously obscure Latinisation of a Greek transliteration of the Arabic name محمد (Muhammad). A leading proponent of the Maometis interpretation was Walmesley, the Roman Catholic bishop of Rama.^[45] Other proponents include 16–17th century Catholic theologians Gilbert Genebrard, François Feuardent, and René Massuet.^[46] Maometis in Greek numerals totals 666:

<u>M</u>	<u>α</u>	<u>ο</u>	<u>μ</u>	<u>ε</u>	<u>τ</u>	<u>ι</u>	<u>ς</u>	Sum
40	1	70	40	5	300	10	200	666

Thom (1923)^[47] rejects "Maometis" as a valid translation, observing that

"of the seven different ways in which Muhammad's name is written in Euthymius and [by] the Byzantine historians, not *one* is the orthography in question".

None of the spellings actually used add up to 666 under Greek gematria.^[47]

Setton (1992) is critical of the idea: Muhammad was frequently defamed and made a subject of *legends*, taught by preachers as *fact*.^{[48]:1–5} For example, in order to show that Muhammad was the anti-Christ, it was asserted that Muhammad died not in the year 632 but in the year 666. In another variation on the theme the number "666" was also used to represent the period of time Muslims would hold sway of the land.^{[48]:4–15} In *Quia maior*, the encyclical calling for the Fifth Crusade, Euthymius Zygabenus and Zonaras wrote the name as "Maometh" and Cedrenus wrote the name "Mouchoumet" none of which is the "Maometis" in question.

King of Israel

Fr. Sloet of Holland proposed the title of Antichrist as king of Israel.^[49] He wrote that, "The Jews have ever looked forward to the Messiah as a great leader to restore the kingdom of Israel. They rejected Jesus because He did not fulfill this expectation... He will be king of a restored Israel, not only king, but the king par excellence. In Hebrew this idea could be expressed by the words (hammelek l'Yisrael), which have the requisite numerical value of 666; but in order to obtain this number kaph medial (כ) must be used in melek (king) instead of kaph final (ך)."^[50]

Mark of the beast

The Classical Greek word *charagma* (χάραγμα), translated as *mark* (of the beast) in Revelation 13:16 can also mean *any mark engraved, imprinted, or branded; stamped money, document, or coin*.^{[51][52]}

The mark of the beast is interpreted differently across the four main views of Christian eschatology.

Preterist view

A common preterist view of the Mark of the beast (focusing on the past) is the stamped image of the emperor's head on every coin of the Roman Empire: the stamp on the hand or in the mind of all, without which no one could buy or sell.^[53] New Testament scholar C.C. Hill notes, "It is far more probable that the mark symbolizes the all-embracing economic power of Rome, whose very coinage bore the emperor's image and conveyed his claims to divinity (e.g., by including the sun's rays in the ruler's portrait). It had become increasingly difficult for Christians to function in a world in which



Coin showing Nero distributing charity to a citizen, c. 64–66

public life, including the economic life of the trade guilds, required participation in idolatry."^[54]

Adela Yarbro Collins further denotes that the refusal to use Roman coins resulted in the condition where "no man might buy or sell".^{[55][56]} A similar view is offered by Craig R. Koester. "As sales were made, people used coins that bore the images of Rome's gods and emperors. Thus each transaction that used such coins was a reminder that people were advancing themselves economically by relying on political powers that did not recognize the true God."^[57]

In 66 AD, when Nero was emperor—about the time some scholars say Revelation was written—the Jews revolted against Rome and coined their own money.

The passage is also seen as an antithetical parallelism to the Jewish institution of *tefillin*—Hebrew Bible texts worn bound to the arm and the forehead during daily prayer. Instead of binding their allegiance to God to their arm and head, the place is instead taken with people's allegiance to the beast.^[53]

Idealist view

Idealism, also known as the allegorical or symbolic approach, is an interpretation of the book of Revelation that sees the imagery of the book as non-literal symbols.^[58]

The idealist perspective on the number of the beast rejects gematria, envisioning the number not as a code to be broken, but a symbol to be understood. Idealists would contend that because there are so many names that can come to 666 and that most systems require converting names to other languages or adding titles when convenient, it has been impossible to come to a consensus.

Given that numbers are used figuratively throughout the Book of Revelation, idealists interpret this number figuratively as well. The common suggestion is that because seven is a number of "completeness" and is associated with the divine, six is "incomplete", and the three sixes are "inherently incomplete".^{[20]:722} The number is therefore suggestive that the Dragon and his beasts are profoundly deficient.

Historicist view

Historicists believe Revelation articulates a full range of the history of the Christian church, from John's day to the Second Coming of Christ. The author alludes to Daniel 2:28 and 2:45; Daniel's vision (Daniel 2) uses symbols giving a sequence of future events in history, from the Babylonian empire, through Medo-Persian period, Greece and Rome, continuing until the end of the current civilization.

The Augsburg confession given to Charles V in its 28th article stated "They likewise cite that the Sabbath has been changed to Sunday contrary to the Ten Commandments, as they see it, and no example is hyped and cited so much as the changing of the Sabbath, and they thereby wish to preserve the great authority of the church, since it has dispensed with the Ten Commandments and altered something in them."^[59] Rome was identified as the little horn power that changed times and laws (Daniel 7:25). Some protestants such as the London minister Thomas Tillam and court physician Peter Chamberlen during the reformation began to identify Sunday worship as the Mark of the Beast.^{[60][61]}

This apocalyptic volume builds on Daniel's approach focusing on major points of Christian history:

the cross of Christ (Rev. 5:6,9,12); the Second Coming (Rev. 14:14–16; 19:11–16); the 1,000 years in heaven (Rev. 20:4–6); the third advent of Christ to earth along with his loyal followers and the destruction of Satan and those who refused Christ (Rev. 20:7–15); and the creation of a new heavens and a new earth where death, sorrow, and sin cease and God dwells with His people (Rev. 21:1–8, 21:22–27; 22:1–5). The Book of Daniel is divided into two parts: The historical narrative of the captivity of Judah, and the prophecies pointing to both promised Messiah and the events of the end of the world. Attention to the text of Revelation aids the student of Bible prophecy by showing how the Apostle John and Jesus intended us to interpret Bible apocalyptic literature as found in Daniel.^[62]

Seventh-day Adventists taking this view believe that the 'mark of the beast' (but not the number 666) refers to a future, universal, legally enforced Sunday-sacredness. "Those who reject God's memorial of creatorship—the Bible Sabbath—choosing to worship and honor Sunday in the full knowledge that it is not God's appointed day of worship, will receive the 'mark of the beast'."^[63] "The Sunday Sabbath is purely a child of the Papacy. It is the mark of the beast."^[64] In the encyclical *Dies Domini*, Pope John Paul II stated that "The Sunday assembly is the privileged place of unity: it is the setting for the celebration of the *sacramentum unitatis* which profoundly marks the Church" and this was also repeated in other catechisms and documents.^{[65][66][67]} Adventists note the old testament definition of a hand and forehead mark in texts like Exodus 13:9, Exodus 31:13-17, Ezekiel 20:12 provide important understanding of terms in Revelation's figurative language.

Seventh Day Adventist Comparisons of Revelation's warnings with the Decalogue

Do not worship the beast	Commandment 1 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Do not worship the image of the beast	Commandment 2 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.
Do not receive the name of the beast	Commandment 3 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
Do not honor Sunday with worship.	Commandment 4 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Futurist view

Some fundamentalist Christian groups, as well as various Christian writers in other traditions, interpret the mark as a requirement for all commerce to mean that the mark might actually be an object in the right hand or forehead with the function of a credit card, such as RFID microchip implants.^[68] Some of these groups believe the implantation of chips may be the imprinting of the mark of the beast, prophesied to be a requirement for all trade and a precursor to God's wrath.^{[69][70]} Similar objections were raised about barcodes upon their introduction.^[71]

Numerical significance

Bahá'í Faith

In the writings of the Bahá'í Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the numerical value given to the beast referred to the year^[72] when the Umayyad ruler Muawiyah I took office as Caliph in 661 AD. He opposed the Imamate, according to the beliefs of Shia Islam, who continued to pay the tax required of nonbelievers and were excluded from government and the military, and thus bore a social "mark".^[73] (See also the scholarly accepted year of birth of Jesus about 666 years before as well as

the concept of Mawali who were non-Arab Muslims but not treated as other Muslims.)

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the beast identified by the number 666 represents the world's unified governments in opposition to God. The beast is said to have "a human number" in that the represented governments are of a human origin rather than spirit entities. The number 666 is said to identify "gross shortcoming and failure in the eyes of Jehovah", in contrast to the number 7, which is seen as symbolizing perfection.^[74]

Fear and superstition

The fear of 666 (six hundred sixty-six) as the number of the beast is called **hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia**.^{[75][76]} Variant phobias are called **hexakosioihekkaidekaphobia**, which is the fear of 616 (six hundred sixteen), and **hexaphobia**, which is the fear of 6 (six). Known cases of these fears include:

- In 1989, Nancy and Ronald Reagan, when moving to their home in the Bel-Air section of Los Angeles after the 1988 election, had its address—666 St. Cloud Road—changed to 668 St. Cloud Road.^{[77][78]}
- In 1988, the address of Chicago's American Furniture Mart building was changed by its new owner from 666 to 680 N Lake Shore Drive, ostensibly to distance the new tenancy from the former owners' financial problems.
- In 2003, U.S. Route 666 in New Mexico was changed to U.S. Route 491. A New Mexico spokesperson stated, "The devil's out of here, and we say goodbye and good riddance."^[79]
- The phobia has been a motif in various horror films such as *The Omen* and its 2006 remake (released on 6/6/06), and in music albums such as Iron Maiden's *The Number of the Beast*. The number of the beast also appears in films such as *Pulp Fiction*, *The Doom Generation*, *End of Days*, *Final Destination*, *Bedazzled*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*.
- Some women expressed concern about giving birth on June 6, 2006 (6/6/06).^[80]
- In November 2013, Codie Thacker—a cross-country runner at Whitley County High School in Williamsburg, Kentucky—refused to run in her Kentucky High School Athletic Association regional meet, forfeiting a chance at qualifying for the state championships, when her coach drew bib number 666.^[81]
- In 2015, US Representative Joe Barton had the number of a legislative bill he had introduced changed from 666 to 702 because "the original bill number carried many different negative connotations", according to a spokesperson.^[82]
- In 2017, church leaders in Papua New Guinea were concerned by newspaper reports that the Governor-General had been requested to sign 666 writs for an upcoming election. They were reassured by the Electoral Commissioner that the number merely reflected 6 copies of each writ for 111 electorates.^[83]
- In October 2017, flight AY666 from Copenhagen to Helsinki (HEL) departed for the last time before being renamed to AY954. Since 2006, the flight had been scheduled on a Friday the 13th on 21 occasions. A Finnair spokesperson said that the number had not been renamed due to superstitious passengers.^[84]
- In 2021, Brookfield Properties decided to renumber 666 Fifth Avenue in Midtown Manhattan, which it had just acquired and planned to spend \$400 million renovating, to 660 Fifth

Avenue.^[85]

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, some groups associated COVID-19 vaccines and mask wearing with the mark of the beast, or that it was a microchip in the vaccine.^[86] Some religious leaders spoke out against this misinformation,^[87] as did medical institutions such as Hennepin County Medical Center.^[88] A similar version was spread by Marjorie Taylor Greene, who referred to vaccine passports as being the mark of the beast.^[89]

See also

- 666 (number)
- 666 (Thelema)
- 2300 day prophecy
- Biblical numerology
- Classical antiquity
- Christian eschatology
- Curse and mark of Cain
- Day-year principle
- Fifth Monarchists
- Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
- Human branding
- Names for the number 0
- Numerology and the Church Fathers#Irenaeus
- Prophecy of Seventy Weeks
- Tetraphobia
- List of phobias, including Numerophobia
- *The Number of the Beast* (album)
- Whore of Babylon
- The Queen's Beasts
- V sign



Footnotes

- a. Berthold-Bond (1989)^[34] notes in consensus that Revelation was written around 95 AD.
- b. Lewis (n.d.),^[35] along with other scholars, notes that Revelation was written about 95 AD.

References

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4. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle and Aland, 1991, footnote to verse 13:18 of Revelation, page 659: "-σιοι δέκα ἕξ" as found in C [C=Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus]; for English see Metzger's *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, note on verse 13:18 of Revelation, page 750: "the numeral 616 was also read ..."
5. Samuel Fuller, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine self-interpreted*, page 226 (<https://archive.org/stream/revelationofstjo00full#page/226/mode/2up>)
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