

## Series: Bible math

### #666

*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.*

*Revelation 13:18*

The number 666 is a significant number in the Bible.

For one thing, it is symbolic of incompleteness and chaos, for 6 is the number just short of 7, the number of perfection and completion.

But in addition, it has "gematric value," as Revelation 13:18 indicates. What is gematria? In Greek and Hebrew, each letter of the alphabet is also a number. *Alpha* (Gk.) and *aleph* (Heb.) function as the numeral one, and so forth. Thus any name or ordinary word has a numerical value equal to the sum of the values of its letters. So you could represent a name by its number equivalent. On a wall at Pompeii was found this bit of graffiti: *I love the girl whose name is 545*. Instead of writing *Jesus*, believers would just write *888*, which is the number of his name! That's gematria.

As you can see, it's easy to get from a name to a number, if you know the numerical value of the alphabetic letters. But to get from a number to a name is guesswork resulting in any number of conclusions, as the history of speculation about 666 shows. The most common explanation? *Nero Caesar* = 666, when the Greek name is written in Hebrew letters. (Using the Latin name gives you 616.) It's surely no coincidence that the numerical value of *Beast* in Hebrew is also 666.

But there is more to the number 666 than meets the eye in another way: mathematics. It is a doubly triangular number: the triangle of 36 ( $1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + 36 = 666$ ), which is itself the triangle of the number 8 ( $1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + 8 = 36$ ). Could John be telling his early readers in this additional way that Nero is an *antichrist* figure (1 John 2:18), for he is related to the seven heads of the Beast as #8?

1. Be pr\_\_\_\_\_.

2. Be po\_\_\_\_\_.

3. Be pr\_\_\_\_\_.