

Maths and Magic

Couple, dozen, score and century? Or should it be two, twelve, twenty and one hundred? The way we express numbers can be richly diverse. They can be used to be very precise, or they can express something wider. Like when most of us say 'a handful'; we don't automatically mean five, nor the amount that can be literally held in our hand.

But put a Bible into the hands of someone who does not understand the many functions of numbers, let alone the truth of the Christian Faith, and we've got a dangerous problem. Numbers can become a curious combination of mathematics and mysterious magic.

This is especially true of the Book of Revelation. The early Christian Church understood the danger of this book falling into the hands of private prophets and masters of magic. She spent nearly three hundred years deciding whether the Book of Revelation should be part of the New Testament. And even then, she did not include it in the regular reading of the Bible in church. Yes, it was accepted as an inspired book of scripture; written by John the Evangelist. Yes, it does describe the continuing sufferings of a worshipping Church throughout all ages, her final triumph, and the assertion that Christ has already won the battle through his glorious resurrection; but it isn't a book of magic.

And what about all those numbers, and above all, the 666 of the Beast? Well, if you make the letter A equal one, B equal two, etc: then 'Beware of the next parliamentary governments of the United Kingdom' gives 666. So is it time to be on our guard after the next General Election?

Yes, but not just then; also now and always. Because the message of the Bible is not about playing with numbers; and it is not just for one particular people, time, or place. Instead, it is a message for all of Creation in every age. Each one of these will have its tribulation, its Whore of Babylon and its Beast. But they are a just taster of what will ultimately come. Our Lord warns of two things when we consider the future. First; of the nature of the End (Matthew 24:35). Second; that we cannot know when it will be (Matthew 24:36). Meanwhile we are told: 'Watch'. (Matthew 25:1-13).

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