

Revelation 13:18 in the Navajo Bible

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Díí hódzǎ át'é. Éé'di'yíitíhíí bíní'díí naaldlooshíí naayéé' nilíinii be'éélta'ii yéé'deetíh, háálá éí nihokáá' dine'é be'éélta'ii át'é, be'éélta'ii hastáadi neeznádiindóó ba'aan hastáadiindóó ba'aan hastááh. (Revelation 13:18)¹

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)²

Introduction

Here the Navajo is potentially more correct than NIV. I say potentially because it depends on how we read the English. If we read "666" as $600 + 60 + 6$, the two are equivalent. If we read "666" as $6 + 6 + 6$, the Navajo is more accurate. What the Greek says is *hexakosioi hexēkonta hex* "six hundred sixty-six."

The Number 666

The text

Why should this matter? This is a question to raise sometime when your paying your bills. If the bill says you owe \$666.00 and you say to yourself that this is just three sixes side by side, you could wind up paying the wrong amount. If you owe \$666.00 and pay \$18.00, that won't work. At issue is whether we look at the text and get the right number or the wrong number. 666 is indeed three sixes side by side, but it matters where you put them. This was not always the case. It will help to know something about the history of the numbers we use.

In ancient mathematics the Babylonians had a rudimentary concept of zero as a place holder, although it was not a number as such and even the idea of relative horizontal placement of numbers was not fully developed. In the Babylonian system numbers like 2 and 20 looked the same³ because the place holder (a rough equivalent of zero) was not used at the end of a string of numbers. The Greeks debated what zero might mean as a number. But it was not until the ninth century that the Arabs brought the east Indian concept of zero to Europe, where it was soon used as both a place holder and a true number.⁴ Using this system 666 (three identical numerals side by side on the same line) is equivalent to

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

² English Bible quotations not otherwise marked are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

³ The characters they used did not look anything like ours.

⁴ For an overview of this topic see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero>.

$$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ 6 \\ 6 \end{array}$$

(side by side, as it were, but on different lines) where the correct alignment is maintained with zeros. This is why we all learn to add in the following manner:

$$\begin{array}{r} 600 \\ 60 \\ \underline{6} \\ 666 \end{array}$$

Which of course is widely different from simply lining the numbers up above each other, as in our earlier example of paying bills:

$$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ 6 \\ \underline{6} \\ 18 \end{array}$$

When John wrote the book of Revelation he wrote out the words *hexakosioi hexēkonta hex* ("six hundred sixty-six"), just as the Navajo translators did (*hastáadi neeznádiindóó ba'aan hastádiindóó ba'aan hastááh*). This is the way it appears in printed copies of the Greek New Testament. In some early manuscripts (the one I'm thinking of is $\mathfrak{P}47$ from the second half of the third century) the numbers are abbreviated, rather than written out, but each number uses a different character. It's not $\zeta = 6$, $\zeta = 6$, $\zeta = 6$, but $\chi = 600$, $\xi = 60$, $\zeta = 6$.⁵

All of this is in aid of saying that the Navajo translators of this passage did it right. Another thing the did right has to do with the words *nihokáá' dine'é be'éelta'ii át'é*. What this means is, "it is the number of a human," not, "it is the number of a man." The number does not just apply to one man – one individual. So those who wish to apply this symbol to Nero, or whoever, have not come to grips with the significance of the present clause.

The meaning of the text

Who is this talking about? That goes beyond the scope of our paper. I merely point out that whatever (or whoever) it is, it is something (or someone) who is immensely popular.

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast– all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. (Revelation 13:8)

The text doesn't say everyone will serve this beast power; it says they will worship it. People can be made to serve an authority they don't like. We see this is in many parts of our world today. But worship is another matter. "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast." They like the beast. It is not something they see as hostile to their interests, but just the opposite. That's the sea beast (Revelation 13:1-10) that comes before. The sea beast is then followed by an equally powerful earth beast (Revelation 13:11-18).

⁵ Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), p. 346

He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. (Revelation 13:12)

The extremely interesting thing about the earth beast is that it doesn't see the sea beast as a competitor. Always before, the various world empires (described in Daniel) arose at each other's expense. Thus, when Medo-Persia rose, Babylon fell. When Greece rose, Persia fell. When Rome rose, Greece fell. Notice carefully that if we have no room for Rome in the sequence, we have no room for Jesus, because Jesus was not crucified by Greeks. He was crucified by Romans. The prophecy we're studying here describes a later time in history, but the point to notice is that when the earth beast rises, the sea beast does not fall. Instead, it gains even greater prestige. There is a fatal wound and this must heal, but the sea beast does not fall. The earth beast "made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed."

From here you'll need to compare passage with passage. If you look up all the passages in the New Testament that discuss these things, you'll know who it is. If you study selectively, including this but skipping over that, maybe you won't know who it is.

Conclusion

If you haven't looked up the passages, and if you aren't able to see for yourself what these things mean, and if I merely tell you what I think it means or who I think it is (bearing in mind that this is not a single individual), a couple of things follow from that. First, you wouldn't believe me. And second, if you did, you shouldn't. You should study this matter out for yourself and be sure you've read *everything* the Bible says on the topic. That's the only way to be sure. What I'm saying in the present paper is simply that the Navajo translation is well done and will point you in the right direction.