

The Hidden Bible

Excerpt 1

The next Sunday, Robert felt dreadfully self-conscious walking alone into the huge sanctuary of the evangelical church near campus, which was popular with the university students. Even though the ushers greeted him warmly, he felt out of place. He took a seat on the end of the aisle near the back and read the bulletin until the pastor began the service. For a few minutes, he wondered if he had made a mistake in coming, if his resolve was strong enough to do this alone — when his heart ached to have Maria by his side — and whether he could live a completely new life amongst people he did not even know. As the preparatory music stopped, indicating the service was about to begin, he felt the blush of shame, thinking of how his mother had died before seeing him saved and sitting in a true Christian church.

Right before the sermon, the pastor announced, “Every Sunday at this time, we take a moment to greet one another. Please say ‘Hello’ and shake the hand of everyone around you.”

As soon as the organist started playing ‘Because He Lives’, the congregants rose to their feet to greet one another. After shaking hands with the people on his left and right, Robert turned around to find himself standing face-to-face with an exceptionally beautiful, radiant young woman. The young woman reached out her hand. “Hi! I’m Valerie.”

Robert was awestruck for a moment. Quickly regaining his composure, he replied, “Hi. I’m Robert.”

“Welcome, Robert. I don’t recall ever seeing you here before.”

“It’s my first Sunday... In fact, I’m a new Christian, and just started attending church...” Robert stopped himself, feeling he was starting to ramble a bit too much.

“So, you’re here alone?” Valerie asked.

“Yes. I don’t have any Christian friends in town.”

“Well, you’ve got one now.” Valerie reached into her pocket and whipped out her cell phone. “Give me your number and I’ll text you with mine. My dad’s the pastor here. I’m staying in town at my parent’s place, to save money until I leave for a missionary trip later this year. You can call me anytime with any questions you might have.”

“Okay,” Robert said, with a nervous smile, and then he gave her his number.

The conversation ended abruptly as the song finished, and the pastor approached the microphone ready to start the sermon.

The pastor began. “Now that we are in the end times, I find myself preaching more and more from the last book of the Bible — the book of Revelation — the book that details God’s plan for the apocalyptic end of the world. And perhaps the question that I get asked the most is, ‘Pastor, who is the Beast of Revelation? Who is the man represented by the devil’s number, 666?’ So today, I’m going to start my sermon by sharing with you what the Bible has to say about the identity of this demonic individual.”

Robert was sitting on the edge of his seat.

If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the Beast, for it is a man’s number. His number is 666.¹

Then the preacher explained. “The Bible says that only those who are given special insight from God can know who the Beast is. John, the author of Revelation, was telling his readers that the identity of the horrible Beast was going to remain a mystery to most of humanity until the day the Beast emerges on the scene. So, ‘who is the Beast?’ I don’t know. And according to the Bible, I can’t know. And if that’s the way God wants it, then that’s the way it will be.”

After all that buildup, Robert felt a little deflated. Ever since becoming a Christian, he had been wondering who the Antichrist — the Beast of Revelation — was going to be. Now he realized that he was never going to know. The Bible clearly said that it was a mystery that only those with special insight would be able to know.

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1 Revelation 13:18 NIV

Over the next three weeks, Robert didn't have any contact with Maria. As badly as he wanted to be with her, he was determined to give her the space she needed to realize how wrong she had been about her church and the Bible. And he needed the time to help build his resolve to remain apart from her forever, if she refused to become saved.

Then on a Tuesday afternoon, Robert attended his Ancient Greek Language class. As a senior, much of the class was dedicated to advanced language topics, such as idioms and cultural expressions.

The teacher began. "Today, we're going to talk about the ancient Greek idiom: 'to have a mind.' The early Greeks used this expression in the same way we use the phrase 'anybody with half a brain.' In fact, the early Greeks used the opposite phrase, 'to not have a mind' when speaking about the senseless and the insane."

Robert took copious notes throughout the class, as usual. And when class ended, he rushed to his dorm room to start his daily Bible study.

Robert was delighted that the concordance showed that the Greek phrase 'to have mind' was in the Bible. And he was even more thrilled when he realized the phrase was used in the passage in Revelation that describes the identity of the dreaded Beast of Revelation. He grabbed his Greek Bible, and opened it to the passage. But when he read the sentence in Greek, applying what he had learned in class, he felt odd. Then he started feeling numb and then started shaking. He reread the sentence over and over again:

Let **anyone who has a mind** calculate the number of the Beast. For it is a man's number. And his number is 666.²

In an effort to wrap his brain around what the Greek Bible said, Robert took a piece of paper and wrote out a direct translation of the sentence:

2 Revelation 13:18 Greek literal

Let **anybody with half a brain** calculate the number of the Beast. For it is a man's number. And his number is 666.³

“This doesn't make any sense,” Robert said to himself. “According to the original Greek Bible, anybody with half a brain will know who the Beast of Revelation is, and only the senseless and the insane won't be able to figure it out. Not only does the original Bible say it's not a mystery — it says the answer is as obvious as the nose on the reader's face.”

Robert sat for a while, thinking about the implications of what he had just read. It was then when he had his ‘Eureka’ moment. “If the author of Revelation expected every first century reader with half a brain to know the identity of the Beast, then he couldn't have been writing about anyone in the distant future. He must have been writing about someone they were all already familiar with — someone in the first century.”

The implied logic slapped him in the face. “But the Beast of Revelation is inextricably tied to the teaching of the Rapture,” he uttered. “And if the Beast of Revelation has already come and gone, that would mean there can't be any Rapture. And if that's the case, then everything I saw in that movie at Mom's church is fiction.”

3 Revelation 13:18 Greek with idiom translated

Excerpt 2

As Robert pondered the questions raised by the translation, he saw his phone on the desk and remembered Valerie's offer to answer any questions he might have. A quick phone call and he had a meeting that evening arranged at Sammy's, at Valerie's suggestion. Robert knew the area well, as it was only a few blocks from Maria's sorority house.

The hostess led Robert and Valerie over to a window seat. After they had both ordered, Robert explained the Greek idiom 'anyone who has a mind.' Then he showed Valerie that Revelation says that 'anybody with half a brain' will know who the Beast of Revelation is by the number 666.

Valerie was completely unfazed. "I can see why you would think the statement is mistranslated based on what you learned in class," she said with a laugh. "But when you think about it, the sentence itself shows that it truly is a mystery, not something the first century readers were expected to know."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because, just as you said, the author of Revelation used a very cryptic, complex cipher based on the number 666. Obviously, he would never have used such an unsolvable riddle if he expected 'anybody with half a brain' to know who he was writing about."

Robert nodded. "I don't know why I didn't think of that before. It was right in front of me the whole time. I'm so glad I have you to talk to."

Excerpt 3

The next morning, Robert was still reeling from the events at the restaurant, as he opened his books and began to do his homework. The assignment for his Greek class involved translating various passages containing the Greek idioms ‘to have a mind’ and ‘to not have a mind.’

As Robert thought about the meanings that his teacher had given him, he became increasingly agitated. “My professor has to be wrong about the meanings of these idioms. After all, the Bible uses these expressions opposite to the way she has taught us,” he said to himself.

After a couple more minutes, Robert closed his books. “I need to talk to Professor Harrison about this. She should know that she’s not teaching us the correct meanings.”

Excerpt 4

“I think you might have taught us the wrong meaning of a Greek idiom,” Robert nervously blurted out to his professor in her office.

Professor Harrison cracked a half smile in what seemed to Robert like bemusement. “Well, I’m always willing to learn new things, Robert. So please, tell me what my star student has discovered.”

The professor’s response put Robert at ease, although he wasn’t sure that she was taking him seriously. “I found a first century document that uses an idiom in the exact opposite way that you said the expression was used.”

“Let me tell you that I couldn’t be more delighted that you’re reading Greek texts above and beyond the homework I give you. So, which idiom are you talking about?”

“To have mind.”

The professor leapt from her chair, walked over to the bookshelf, and grabbed two books. She flipped through the first book, a very big book. Then, pointing to an entry on a page, she said, “I assume you didn’t look up the expression in a *Greek English Lexicon* by Liddell and Scott, which you know is the most authoritative dictionary of Greek. Notice the entry for the idiom ‘to have mind’? Why don’t you read the primary meaning aloud?”

Robert read, “To have *sense*, be *sensible*.”⁴

The teacher nodded. “So, just as you learned in class, the idiom has to do with having common sense and sensibility. That’s why I told you it’s similar to the English slang, ‘anybody with half a brain’, as this slang means, ‘anyone with common sense.’” The professor opened the second book entitled *In and Out of the Mind*. She pointed to a paragraph, and once again, asked Robert to read it aloud.

⁴ νοῦν ἔχειν : a) to have *sense*, be *sensible*, *Greek English Lexicon*, by Liddell and Scott, p. 1180

“People who act with nous [the Greek word for mind], and ‘have’ it, are sensible. People who do not are senseless, unwise, insane.”⁵

The professor nodded once again. “So you see, Robert, ‘to not have mind’ meant ‘to be senseless, unwise, insane,’ just as I taught you. Both expressions mean exactly what you learned in class.”

“But that just doesn’t make any sense,” Robert blurted out. “Why then would a first century writer say anybody with half a brain — anyone who isn’t senseless or insane — would know who he was referring to when he gave ‘the man’s number?’”

The teacher laughed. “But of course a first century writer would say only a half-wit wouldn’t know who he was referring to. For in first century Greek, everyone was identified by both their name and their number.”

“I don’t understand.”

“In a week, we’ll be discussing this topic in great detail in class. But I’d be glad to give you a brief overview of why only an insane individual in the first century would not know the identity of a person by that person’s number.”

“Okay.”

The professor walked over to her filing cabinet and pulled out a sheet of paper with the following on it:

5 *In and Out of the Mind*, by Ruth Padel, 1994, p. 32

Symbol	Character	Number
A	A	1
B	B	2
Γ	G	3
Δ	D	4
E	E	5
F	V, W	6
Z	Z	7
H	Ē	8
Θ	Th	9
I	I	10
K	K	20
Λ	L	30
M	M	40
N	N	50
Ξ	X	60
O	O	70
Π	P	80
ϙ	Q	90
P	R	100
Σ	S	200
T	T	300
Υ	Y, U	400
Φ	Ph	500
X	Ch	600
Ψ	Ps	700
Ω	Ō	800
Ϡ	(Sanpi)	900

The professor explained the chart. “In the first century, every Greek symbol represented both a letter and a number *at the same time*. For example, the first symbol in the chart represented both the letter ‘A’ and the number ‘1’ *at the same time*. Because of this duality, the collection of symbols comprising a person’s identity represented a collection of letters (the person’s name) and a collection of numbers (the number of the person’s name) *at the same time*.”

“For example, let’s consider Jesus of Nazareth, a very famous individual from the first century. Jesus was identified by the Greek symbols: $\text{I H } \Sigma \text{ O Y } \Sigma$. And these symbols represented both Jesus’ Greek name (IĒSOUS) and the number of Jesus’ name (888) [10 + 8 + 200 + 70 + 400 + 200] *at the same time*. So, whenever a first century Greek saw those symbols, he thought of both Jesus’ name and the number of his name each time. People’s names and the number of their names were inextricably linked to one another.”

“I can see from the chart that early Greek symbols were letters and numbers at the same time,” Robert concurred. “But do we have any archaeological evidence that they actually used both the letters and the numbers to identify people?”

“Very good question as usual, Robert!” the professor exclaimed. She walked back to her filing cabinet and returned with yet another handout. “Here’s an example from a late first century Christian writing.”

And then the child of the great God to man shall come incarnate, being fashioned like mortals on the earth... 888 will the name **reveal** to men who are giving up to unbelief.⁶

The professor looked up at Robert. “In this first century document, did the writer say he was *concealing* or *revealing* the person’s identity with the number 888?”

Robert read the excerpt. “The number was used to *reveal* the person’s identity.”

“Precisely. In this Christian writing, the number of Jesus’ name was used to *reveal* his identity, not to hide it. The writer of this document wanted unbelievers to know precisely whom he was talking about. That’s why he wrote ‘888 will the name *reveal*’. And quite literally, given Jesus’ fame in the first century, only a senseless or insane person in that culture would not know who this document was referring to. And that must be the same situation with the document you are referring to. If the writer said ‘anyone who has a mind’ will know who a person is by their number, then you can be sure that the writer is referring to the

6 *The Sibylline Oracles, Book I, lines 393 - 399*

number of a very prominent, very famous, person of that time. That's the meaning of the passage you are translating."

"Wow!" Robert exclaimed. "Thank you."

"You're very welcome. And I'm sure you'll find next week's class on this matter even more interesting and more enlightening. There was so much going on during this time regarding people's names and numbers — fascinating things."

Robert shook the professor's hand and headed to the door.

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When Robert returned to his dorm room, he was excited on one hand, yet upset on the other. He was excited that he might be able to find out who the Beast of Revelation was. Yet he was upset at the thought that Valerie's Bible had mistranslated the sentence. And he was also upset that her church didn't teach her how numbers were used to reveal people's identities in the first century. Instead, her church taught that numbers were used as complex riddles — the exact opposite of the way they were used in the first century.

Robert shook off his concern. "So the Book of Revelation wanted to reveal the identity of the Beast... not conceal it. And the number 666 must refer to an extremely prominent person — which is why Revelation's author wrote that only an idiot won't know who he was referring to. This means, the identity of the Beast can be solved with certainty. I *can* know who the Beast is."

Robert pondered all he had learned. Then he added the following entry to his journal:

CLUES TO THE BEAST OF REVELATION:

The number of the beast's name is 666, which means the sum of the symbols of his name is 666.

Anybody with half a brain will know him by this number, which means the beast was so popular that only a crazy person wouldn't recognize him by the number 666.