

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Revelation 13

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January 23, 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In September 2021, an article in USA today was titled, “Some say COVID-19 vaccine is the ‘mark of the beast.’ Is there a biblical connection?”
2. I have heard this suggestion from a number of people.
3. Right after the vaccine was released, I spoke with one man who said he had evidence that a microchip of some sort was being inserted into people’s arms along with the vaccine. What was his evidence? He has two friends who placed magnets on their arms where they were injected, and the magnets clung to their arms.
4. Apparently there are some Christians who are afraid to take the vaccine because if it is the mark of the beast, they fear that they will go to hell.
5. What does the Bible teach about the mark of the beast?
6. The mark of the beast is only found in the book of Revelation. The first mention is in Revelation 13.

II. TEXT & COMMENTS: Revelation 13:1-10, 16-18

1 And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads. On its horns were ten crowns, and on its heads were blasphemous names., 2 The beast I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. The dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority. 3 One of its heads appeared to be fatally wounded, but its fatal wound was healed.

The whole earth was amazed and followed the beast. 4 They worshiped the dragon because he gave authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to wage war against it?”

5 The beast was given a mouth to utter boasts and blasphemies. It was allowed to exercise authority, for forty-two months. 6 It began to speak blasphemies against God: to blaspheme his name and his dwelling—those who dwell in heaven. 7 And it was permitted to wage war against the saints and to conquer them. It was also given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. 8 All those who live on the earth will worship it, everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered.,

9 If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen.

*10 If anyone is to be taken captive,
into captivity he goes.*

*If anyone is to be killed with a sword,
with a sword he will be killed.*

This calls for endurance and faithfulness from the saints.

*16 And it makes everyone—small and great, rich and poor, free and slave—to
receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, 17 so that no one can buy
or sell unless he has the mark: the beast’s name or the number of its name.*

*18 This calls for wisdom:; Let the one who has understanding calculate the
number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is 666.*

III. THE IDENTITY OF THE BEAST

1. In Revelation 13 John writes about his vision of a beast with ten horns and seven heads who was given power by the dragon to wage war against the saints. This beast requires that anyone who wants to sell must receive its mark on their hand or forehead.
2. Before we can understand the mark of the beast, we must figure out the identity of the beast.
3. Who is the beast?
4. Many assume that the beast of revelation is the antichrist.
 - i. However, the word “antichrist” isn’t found even once in the book of Revelation. It is only found in 1 and 2 John. The same author wrote Revelation and 1 and 2 John. Don’t you think that if the beast is the same as the antichrist, John would have mentioned it? So, it safe to assume that the beast and the antichrist are not the same.
5. Many also assume that the beast is an end-times character that has yet to be revealed.
 - i. There are three main interpretations of the book of Revelation.
 1. Futurist: Most of the prophecies relate to end-times events that still have not occurred.
 2. Idealist: Revelation does not symbolize historical events or characters, but spiritual truths that apply to the church for all time.
 3. Preterist (past): Most of the prophecies in the book of Revelation refer to events that have already occurred. When the book was written, the events were still in the

future, but eventually they were fulfilled and so now they are in our past.

- ii. Some very popular TV and radio preachers are futurists. They tend to read the book of Revelation, and most Bible prophecy, as if it is all unfolding right now in our generation.
 1. **NT scholar Bart D. Ehrman** said we should be “suspicious of interpretations that are blatantly narcissistic; this way of understanding the book maintains that the entire course of human history has now culminated in us!”
 2. If you look back through history, there have always been Christian preachers claiming that they know the identity of the beast, and the antichrist, and that the end of the world was about to occur in their lifetime: Joseph Stalin, Saddam Hussein, Mikhail Gorbachev, Benito Mussolini, Hitler, JFK, Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan. During the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholics believed that the reformers were the antichrist – Calvin, Luther, and Wycliffe. At the same time, the reformers believed that the Pope was the antichrist.
- iii. Many fine scholars read the book of Revelation from a preterist perspective. If you read Revelation from a preterist perspective, then the beast has already come and gone. He is in our past.
- iv. How is it possible to read Revelation from a preterist perspective? All you have to do is to pay attention to John’s own words. There are several very clear time-indicators that book-end the book of Revelation.
 1. **Revelation 1:1-3** “The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatever he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it, because the time is near.”
 - a. Notice the two time-indicators in the first three verses in the book.
 - i. Verse 1: What must soon take place.

- ii. Verse 3: Because the time is near.
- b. Lydia and I are going to Branson, Missouri in a couple of weeks to celebrate our twenty-year wedding anniversary. If you asked me, “When are you going to Branson?” and I said, “Soon,” would you think I meant in a few weeks, or maybe months, or two-thousand years in the future? Soon means soon. Or if I were to answer, “The time is near,” would you think that meant in a few weeks or months, or two-thousand years in the future? Near means near!
- 2. **Revelation 22:10** “Then he said to me, “Don’t seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.”
 - a. John makes it very clear that the events in the book of Revelation are not two-thousand years down the road, but very near to the time that this letter was written in the first century A.D.
 - b. If we take these time-indicators seriously, then it means that the beast, and therefore the mark of the beast, have already come and gone.
- v. Many scholars think that the bulk of Revelation is not about the end-times, but God’s judgment on Israel for killing the Messiah.
 1. **Kenneth Gentry** (one of the foremost experts on the book of Revelation) “The prophecies of Revelation deal with the tremendous spiritual, social, political, and cultural issues leading up to and culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in the ill-fated Jewish War of A.D. 67-70. These issues also include the outbreak of the first Roman persecution of Christianity under Nero Caesar (A.D. 64-68), the extinction of the Julio-Claudian line of emperors when Nero dies (A.D. 68), and the Roman Civil Wars of A.D. 68-69.”
 2. Now, some of the end of Revelation points to the very end, and much of the NT tells about the end times. But the bulk of the text deals with the judgment on Israel and the Roman persecution against the first-century saints.

6. So, who is the beast of Revelation 13? When we closely examine the text, we can see nine characteristics of the beast, and then be able to identify him with Nero Caesar, the Roman emperor at the time that John wrote this document.

IV. NINE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BEAST

1. He is one of John's contemporaries.

- i. We know that the beast lived during the time of John and the first century church because of the time indicators in the book of Revelation that we have already covered (Rev 1:1-3; 22:10).
- ii. But there is another hint found in verse 18. **Revelation 13:18** "This calls for wisdom:, Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is 666."
 1. John wrote the book of Revelation to seven churches in Asia who lived in the first century. In verse 18 he says that they should be able figure out the identity of the beast by calculating his number, 666.
 2. If the beast was someone that the first century church would be able to identify, then he lived during their time. He definitely wouldn't have been someone living in the 21st century that they would have no knowledge of.
- iii. If the beast is one of John's contemporaries, then this eliminates most of the theories about the identity of the beast, such as the Pope, Hitler, Biden, Obama, etc.

2. He possesses great authority.

- i. **Revelation 13:2** "The dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority."
 1. The dragon refers to Satan (Rev 12:9).
- ii. **Revelation 13:7** "It was also given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation."
- iii. The beast is most likely a political figure, such as a Roman emperor.
- iv. In fact, this fits perfectly with the Roman emperor, who ruled over the entire civilized world at the time. Its sovereignty stretched over three continents.

3. He is characterized by evil, beastly character.

- i. The Greek word for “beast” speaks of wild, carnivorous animals – animals such as those used in the Roman coliseums. The term is applied figuratively to people with a bestial nature. Even today people often say, “That guy’s a beast!” or even “I’m a beast!”
- ii. Notice how John describes the beast:
 - 1. First, he is called a beast, v. 1.
 - 2. Second, on its seven heads were blasphemous names; words that were offensive to God, v. 2.
 - 3. Third, the beast is a compound of three ferocious, carnivorous beasts: a leopard, a bear, and a lion, v. 2.
 - 4. Fourth, with its mouth it uttered boasts and blasphemies, v. 5-6.
 - 5. Fifth, it waged war against the saints, v. 7.
- iii. Was there anyone during the 1st century who had great authority, and who had the character of a beast? Nero Caesar.
- iv. **The Roman historian Seutonius** (A.D. 70-160) wrote about Nero’s “cruelty of disposition” evidencing itself at an early age. He said, “neither discrimination nor moderation [were employed] in putting to death whosoever he pleased on any pretext whatever.”
 - 1. **Seutonius** wrote that Nero forced four hundred Roman senators and six hundred Roman knights, some of whom were very rich and of unblemished character, to fight in the arena.
 - 2. **Seutonius** wrote, “He prostituted his own chastity that after defiling almost every part of his body, he at last devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes.”
- v. **Kenneth Gentry** “Nero enjoys homosexual rape and torture. He ruthlessly kills his parents, brother, wife, aunt, and many others close to him and of high station in Rome.”
- vi. **Pliny the Elder** (A.D. 23-79), a Roman naturalist, described Nero as “the destroyer of the human race” and “the poison of the world.”
- vii. **Apollinius of Tyana** (4 B.C. – A.D. 96), a contemporary of Nero, even called him a “beast.” “In my travels, which have been wider

than ever man yet accomplished, I have seen many, many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs. . . . And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mother, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet.”

viii. **Gary DeMar**, *End Times Fiction*

1. Nero had his mother bludgeoned and slashed to death by marines ordered to do the job after his attempts to poison and drown her failed.
 2. A few years later he had his wife, Octavia, killed so he could marry his mistress, Poppaea.
 3. He kicked Poppaea to death when she was pregnant because complained about him coming home late.
 4. He castrated a boy named Sporus and married him with all the usual ceremonies and treated him as his wife.
- ix. On top of all this, Nero was the first Roman emperor to call for the persecution of Christians.

4. His death almost destroyed the Roman empire.

- i. Scholars almost universally agree that the beast has a specific and a general identity, and John moves back forth between the two. The beast’s specific or individual identity is Nero Caesar. Its general identity is the Roman empire, or the Roman emperor in general.
- ii. Notice that the beast has ten horns and seven heads – this suggests a collective identity such as a kingdom or empire (R.C. Sproul). Later in the book John gives us more information about the seven heads.
 1. **Revelation 17:9-10** “This calls for a mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated. They are also seven kings: Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must remain for only a little while.”
 2. The seven heads represent seven mountains. Almost all scholars agree that the seven mountains refers to the city of Rome, which was famously known for its seven hills.
Hank Hanegraaff (*The Apocalypse Code*, 113) “Rome is

historically depicted as the city of seven hills, Capitoline, Palatine, Esquiline, Aventine, Caelian, Viminal, and Quirinal. Thus, there is little doubt that John had the ancient Roman Empire in mind.”

3. The seven heads also represent seven kings, and it gives us some specific information so that we can figure out who the kings are: “Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must remain for only a little while.” This is a description of the first seven Roman Caesars, of which the initial recipients of Revelation would have been well-acquainted. Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, Caludius – the first five – had fallen. They were already dead. The sixth “is.” At the time of the writing of Revelation, that would have been Nero, who was currently alive and in power. Then the seventh has not yet come, but when he does he will only remain a little while. That describes the emperor immediately after Nero, named Gaius, Galba, who only reigned for seven months.
4. **Romans 13:3** “One of its heads appeared to be fatally wounded, but its fatal wound was healed. The whole earth was amazed and followed the beast.”
 - a. Some people speculate that this means the antichrist is going to die and then rise again, causing many to believe in him. One contemporary prophecy expert maintains that the antichrist is Hitler, who will one day be resurrected. But there is a more sensible interpretation of this verse.
 - b. When Nero, the sixth emperor died, the Roman empire almost fell apart. Rome was in the middle of a war with the Jews, and they were in the midst of civil wars. After Nero passed, three emperors rose and fell quickly, each dying by assassination. It looked to many like the empire was going collapse. It appeared to be “fatally wounded, but its fatal would was healed.”
 - c. After the third emperor following Nero was assassinated, Flavian Vespasian, the Roman general,

became the emperor, and order was reestablished in the empire. Vespasian saved the empire from collapse.

- iii. So, Nero's life also fits verse 3, because his death almost caused the collapse of the Roman empire.

5. He is worshipped.

- i. **Revelation 13:4** They worshiped the dragon because he gave authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to wage war against it?"
- ii. **Revelation 13:8** "All those who live on the earth will worship it, everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered."
- iii. This fits Nero as well. All of the emperors since Julius Caesar were worshiped and considered divine.
- iv. As Nero was returning to Rome from Greece, "The people cried out: 'Thou August, August! To Nero, the Hercules! To Nero, the Apollo! The Eternal One! Thou August! Sacred voice! Happy those who hear thee (Dio Cassius, Roman historian)'"!
- v. Nero thought of himself as the god Apollo.
- vi. In A.D. 55 Nero had a statue built of himself, more than 100 feet tall, and enshrined it in the temple of Mars in Rome.
- vii. Inscriptions found in Ephesus say that Nero was called "Almighty God" and "Savior."
- viii. An inscription in Cyprus referred to Nero as "God and Savior."

6. He is a man.

- i. **Revelation 12:18** "This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is 666."
- ii. This rules out a few things: The beast is not AI (artificial intelligence), or an alien, or a demon. It is a person.

7. He wages war against Christians for forty-two months.

- i. **Revelation 13:5-7** "5 The beast was given a mouth to utter boasts and blasphemies. It was allowed to exercise authority, for forty-two months. 6 It began to speak blasphemies against God: to blaspheme his name and his dwelling—those who dwell in heaven. 7 And it was permitted to wage war against the saints and to conquer them."

- ii. At first, Christians were only persecuted by Jews. Who was responsible for Christ's death? The Jews. The Romans actually executed him, but only to appease the Jews. As you read through the book of Acts, it is the Jews, not the Romans who persecuted the Christians.
- iii. But in A.D. 64 the Great Fire broke out in Rome, threatening Nero's popularity. Different rumors exist as to how the fire started. Some believe that Nero started the fire as a backdrop to one of his musical performances. Another theory is that Nero intentionally started the fire so that he could reconstruct Rome. But when people started to suspect that it was Nero, he blamed it on the Christians. Thus began the official Roman empire's war against Christians.
- iv. The Neronian Persecution:
 - 1. Nero would burn Christians alive to illuminate the circus games, using them as human torches. He covered Christians in animal skins and had them torn apart by dogs. He had many Christians crucified.
 - 2. Remarkably, Nero's persecution against Christians lasted almost exactly 42 months: Nov AD 64 – June AD 68.
 - 3. Roman historian Tacitus says this persecution claimed the lives of "an immense number."
 - 4. Claimed the lives of Peter and Paul in A.D. 66 or 67.

8. He died by the sword.

- i. **Revelation 13:10** "If anyone is to be taken captive, into captivity he goes. If anyone is to be killed with a sword, with a sword he will be killed."
- ii. Other manuscripts say, "If anyone kills with a sword."
- iii. This describes Nero as well.
- iv. He committed suicide in AD 68, when he was 31 years old, early in the Roman civil wars that were erupting against him.
- v. He drove a dagger into his own throat, aided by Epaphroditus, his private secretary.

9. His number is 666.

- i. **Revelation 13:18** "This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is 666."

- ii. The beast's number, which is the number of a person, is 666.
- iii. The first thing to notice is that this is a cryptogram (a puzzle with encrypted text) that the first century Christians would have been able to solve. That's why he tells them to calculate it.
- iv. The second thing to notice is that the number is six-hundred sixty-six, not three sixes.
- v. So, what does the number mean? It is the number of a person.
 - 1. In the first century they didn't have the Arabic numeral system that we now have (developed in the sixth century). Alphabets did double duty. They served as letters, but also as numbers. Think of Roman numerals. I stands for 1, V stands for 5, and X stands for 10.
 - 2. The practice of gematria was also very common back then. A person's name could be reduced to its mathematical value. Each letter in a person's name added up equals its numerical value.
 - 3. So, guess whose name adds up to 666?
 - 4. A Hebrew spelling of Nero's name was Nrwn Qsr (pronounced Neron Kaiser). The numerical value is exactly 666: n [50] r [200] w [6] n [50] q [100] s [60] r [200] = 666
- vi. When put all of this together, I think it is more than a coincidence that it all points to the emperor Nero.
- vii. Now, if Nero is the beast, then what is the mark of the beast?

V. WHAT IS THE MARK OF THE BEAST?

- 1. First, understand the Revelation is a highly symbolic book. So, don't be surprised to learn that the mark of the beast is not literal, but symbolic.
- 2. If you really want to be literal, then the beast, who some think is the antichrist, will actually come out of the sea and have ten horns and seven heads, look like a leopard with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. Nobody takes that literally. So, why should we insist that the mark be literal.
- 3. As well, this is not the only mark in Revelation, or in the Bible. In the very next verse, we find another mark. **Revelation 14:1** "Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." This verse talks about 144,000 Christians who have God's

- name written on their foreheads, but almost nobody believes this mark is literal. So, why should we insist that the mark of the beast be literal?
4. Verse 16 tells us that no one could buy and sell unless they had the mark on his right hand or forehead. If we really want to be literal, then this eliminates the COVID-19 vaccine, because they don't give you the vaccine on your hand or forehead. As well, the vaccine is injected into your body, but the text says that the mark of the beast is a visible, topical mark – on the head, or on the hand.
 5. Verse 17 tells us what the mark is – the beast's number or the number of its name. Again, if we really want to be literal, then this eliminates the COVID-19 vaccine, because the mark is supposed to be 666, not a tiny microchip.
 6. So, what is the mark of the beast? Or, what was the mark of the beast?
 7. Many scholars believe that it was symbolic for allegiance. Having the beast's mark on your forehead referred to people who believed and obeyed whatever the emperor told them; those who even worshiped the emperor. During the Neronian Persecution, for example, no one could buy or sell unless they swore supreme allegiance to the emperor – those who confessed, "Caesar is Lord." This, of course, excluded Christians, because they refused to worship the emperor. For Christians, Jesus is Lord.
 8. **Kenneth Gentry** "Gentry ([blog](#)) "In fact, this mark is actually an image of dominion and control. Notice that in Rev 13:17 no one may buy or sell without the mark. And note also that it is placed on the right hand and the forehead, which appear to represent that which we do (the right hand) and that which we think (the forehead). This speaks of oppressive, domineering control."

VI. CONCLUSION

1. So, the mark of the beast has nothing to do with a current-day vaccine. Take the vaccine if you want to, or don't. My family and I have not taken it.
2. To understand the mark, you must understand the beast. Who is the beast? The beast was Nero Caesar, emperor of Rome at the time of Revelation's composition. And what was his mark, it was symbolic of a person's denial of Christ and allegiance to Caesar.

3. Taken this way, there will always be the mark of the beast that Christians must avoid. The mark is the decision to reject Jesus Christ and worship some other god – be it Allah, or money, or sex, or alcohol.