

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Revelation 13

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. When the COVID-19 vaccine first came out, the government just assumed that everyone would want it. But many didn't want the vaccine, including me. And the government shouldn't have been surprised. The production of the vaccine was rushed. The vaccine companies were given special protections so that if the vaccine ended up hurting people, the companies couldn't be sued. On top of that, the virus itself was turning out to be less dangerous. Of those who contracted COVID-19, only a miniscule percentage were hospitalized, and even a smaller percentage were dying, and of those who were dying, it was primarily the very sick and the elderly. So, many people just decided it was more dangerous to take the vaccine than to risk getting the virus.
2. So, governments around the world started forcing people to take the vaccine. "Take it, or else." In some places around the world, you had to get a vaccine card to prove your vaccination status in order to go to work, to school, to fly, to shop, to use public transportation.
3. Some Christians looked at this and concluded that the vaccine was the mark of the beast found in the book of Revelation.
4. The belief of many Christians is that Revelation is a book about the end times, and the beast of Revelation is the Antichrist, an end-times figure who will persecute Christians. And this Antichrist will force everyone to get a mark on their hand or forehead, the numbers 6-6-6, if you want to buy or sell anything.
5. But of course, this is only the latest theory about the mark of the beast. For the past two thousand years Christians have speculated on the identity of the beast, and the mark of the beast. Some say it will be a microchip or something placed under the skin. Some said it was credit cards. Some said it the UPC symbols, or bar codes.
6. But as we've seen so far in our study, the book of Revelation was written in the first century AD. I believe it was written between 65-66 AD. And

in the first three verses we are told that the events in Revelation “must soon take place” because “the time is near.” Therefore, Revelation is not about the distant future 2,000 years later, but the near future. In fact, Revelation is not about the end of the world, but the end of the Jewish age. The central theme of Revelation is God’s judgment on the Jews for the murder of Jesus and the persecution of His followers. It is about God divorcing Israel and then taking on a new bride, the church. Its prophecies were primarily fulfilled just a few years after it was written, when in AD 70 the Romans invaded Israel and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

7. With that in mind, the beast of Revelation and the mark of the beast are not in our future, or in our present, but in our past. If we want to figure out the mark of the beast and the identity of the beast of Revelation, we need to look not to Fox News but to the first century.
8. We find the beast and his mark in Revelation 13.
9. In Revelation 13, we find the three great enemies of the church in the first century: the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast.
10. David Chilton calls these the “evil triad of enemies facing the early church,” and “the trinity of hostile forces.” Ken Gentry calls them “the unholy trinity.”

II. THE THREE ENEMIES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

1. The Dragon: Satan.

- i. Revelation 13 is not primarily about the dragon, although it mentions him several times. John went into great detail about the dragon in Revelation 12.
- ii. **Revelation 12:9** “So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him.”
- iii. The dragon is the devil and Satan.
- iv. **Revelation 12:17** “So the dragon was furious with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring,—those who keep the commands of God and hold firmly to the testimony about Jesus.”

- v. The dragon attempted to murder the Messiah before He could save the world from sin, but he failed. Then his mission was to wage war against Christians.
- vi. In Revelation 13 we find out how the dragon attacks the church – through two beasts – the sea beast (the Roman Empire), and the land beast (the Jewish religious authorities). In the first century, Satan used these two beast to terrorize the early church.

2. The Sea Beast: The Roman Empire (represented by Nero Caesar).

i. 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.

- ii. The sea beast has both a general meaning, and a specific meaning, and John switches back forth between these two. Generally speaking the sea beast is the Roman empire in its persecution of Christians. Specifically it is the current emperor of Rome, Nero Caesar.
- iii. Let’s look at the reasons the beast represents the Roman Empire.
- iv. Ten Reasons The Sea Beast Is Rome and Nero
 - 1. It came out of the sea.
 - a. Verse 1 says the beast came up out of the sea (v. 1).
 - b. Rome is in Italy, which is across the Mediterranean Sea from Israel. In fact, the quickest way to get to Israel from Rome is take a boat across the sea.
 - 2. It was a political power.
 - a. Verse 1 says it had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its heads. The ten horns and crowns describe a major political power, an empire, which fits Rome.
 - b. Revelation 17 gives us more information about the seven heads.
 - c. **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.”
 - d. The seven heads represent seven mountains. In antiquity Rome was known as the City on Seven hills,

or the Septimontium. It was surrounded by seven hills or mountains, and each one had a name.

- e. The seven heads also represent seven kings. This is a description of the first seven Roman Caesars: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and Galba.
 - f. At the time of this writing, five had fallen and one is. The first five emperors had died, and the sixth, Nero, was the emperor at this time (AD 54-68).
 - g. “The other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must remain for only a little while.” The seventh emperor, Galba, had not yet come into power. But when he did, he only reigned for seven months. The sea beast represents both Rome, and its figurehead, the emperor Nero.
3. It was blasphemous.
- a. Verse 1 says that on its head were blasphemous names.
 - b. The word “blasphemy” is used to describe the beast three times in this passage (1, 5, 6).
 - c. This describes the emperor worship at that time. The Roman emperor was worshiped as a god. Many temples were erected to them throughout the empire. Nero erected a 120-foot image of himself to be worshiped.
 - d. Verses 4 and 8 say that the whole earth worshiped the beast. Everyone in the Roman empire worshiped the emperor or faced the consequences.
4. It had beastly character.
- a. Verse 2 says the beast was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s (v. 2). The beast is compared to three vicious carnivores.
 - b. If anyone had beastly character, it was the emperor Nero. He murdered his mother. First he tried, to poison her, then he tried to drown her, and finally he

ordered his soldiers to slash her to bludgeon and slash her to death. He had his wife, Octavia, killed so that he could marry his mistress Poppaea. He killed Poppaea by kicking her to death when she complained about his coming home late. He had boy named Sporus castrated and then made a woman out of him, and then married him with a huge ceremony, and treated him like his wife.

5. It almost collapsed but was restored.
 - a. Verse 3 says that the beast almost died, but was healed (v. 3).
 - b. Here the symbolism switches back to the Rome empire. After Nero died in AD 68, the Roman empire almost collapsed. Galba came to power, but Rome was plunged into civil war. In AD 69, Rome had four emperors. But just when it looked like it was over for the empire, the general Vespasian took control, became emperor, and restored order.
6. It persecuted the church for forty-two months.
 - a. Verse 5 says it exercised authority for forty-two months (v. 5).
 - b. Now the symbolism switches back to the emperor Nero. He came to power in AD 54, but in AD 64 there was a great fire in the city of Rome. When people started to suspect that he caused it, he blamed the Christians, and for the next forty-two months (3 and a half years) he persecuted Christians all over the empire. Nero was the first Roman emperor to persecute Christians.
7. It demanded worship.
 - a. Verses 16-17 say that everyone had to receive the mark of the beast to buy and sell.
 - b. The mark is symbolic, not literal. Revelation 14:1 speaks of the 144,000 Christians who had the name of Jesus written on their foreheads, and everyone

agrees this is symbolic. It represents people who worshiped Christ. They were symbolically marked for God's protection.

c. The mark of the beast is symbolic of those people who worshiped the emperor. They were symbolically marked for the emperor's protection. If you worshiped the emperor, you were allowed to buy and sell. If you didn't, you were persecuted.

8. Its identity could be discerned by the recipients of Revelation.

a. **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."

b. John is writing to Christians in the first century, expecting that if they are wise they will be able to figure out the identity of the beast. There's no way they could figure out the identity of the beast if he was someone who would appear thousands of years in the future. It had to be someone they were familiar with.

9. It was a person.

a. **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."

b. It is the number of a person. This is how we know that the sea beast is not just the Roman empire, but also represents a person, the figurehead of the Roman empire; the personality behind the Roman empire.

10. Its number is 666

a. Verse 18 says the beast's number is 666.

b. First, the actual Greek reads 600, 60, and 6. So, it is not three numbers – 6, 6, 6, or in Greek hex, hex, hex. The three numbers are 600 (*hexakosioi*), 60

(*hexekonta*), and 6 (*hex*). Added up they equal to six hundred and sixty-six.

- c. Back then they didn't have numbers and letters. They only had letters, and their letters served a dual purpose. They served as letters and numbers. Think of Roman numerals. I = 1, V = 5, X = 10, and so on. The same was true in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. Each letter had a numerical value.
- d. A common practice back then to take a person's name and reduce it to its numerical value. If you find the number of each letter in your name, add it up, then you can calculate the number of your name. In the ancient of Pompeii there is an inscription on a wall that reads, "I love her whose number is 545."
- e. Guess whose name adds up to 666? Nero. The Hebrew spelling of Nero's name is 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.
- v. So, the beast of Revelation is not a future Antichrist, but the Roman empire generally, and the Roman emperor Nero specifically, who Satan used to persecute the Christians in the first century.

3. The land beast: The Jewish Priesthood.

- i. Now we come to the third enemy of the first century church – the land beast.
- ii. **Revelation 13:11-15**

11 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb,, but it spoke like a dragon. 12 It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf and compels the earth and those who live on it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. 13 It also performs great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in front of people. 14 It deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs that it is permitted to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those

who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 15 It was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

- iii. This beast is the Jewish priesthood in the first century, which was under Rome's authority, and which murdered Jesus and persecuted His followers. Let's look more closely.
- iv. Six Reasons The Land Beast is The Jewish Priesthood
 - 1. It came out of the earth (v. 11).
 - a. Remember that the word "earth" can also be translated "land," and that's the best translation here. The first beast came out of the sea, because it came from Rome. This beast comes from the land of Israel.
 - 2. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon (v. 11).
 - a. It was not as mighty as the first beast, which had ten horns, seven heads, and ten crowns. Israel was much smaller than Rome. But it spoke like a dragon. The dragon is Satan, and he speaks lies (Jn 8:44). The Jewish religious leaders looked like an innocent lamb, but they lied like the devil to get Christians into trouble. They tried to use false testimony to convict Christ (Mt 26:59).
 - 3. It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf (v. 12).
 - a. The Jewish priesthood was under the authority of Rome, and carried out the will of Rome. Rome appointed the High Priest, and the high court of Israel, the Sanhedrin, could not even legally convene without the permission of Rome. The Jews could not carry out capital punishment without Rome's permission.
 - 4. It compels the earth and those who live on it to worship the first beast (v. 12).

- a. The chief priests led the Jews to reject Christ in favor of Caesar.
 - b. **John 19:12** “From that moment Pilate kept trying to release him. But the Jews shouted, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Anyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar!”
 - c. **John 19:15** “15 They shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Should I crucify your king?” “We have no king but Caesar!” the chief priests answered.
5. It performs great signs (v. 13).
- a. While there is no record of this, apparently some of the chief priests were empowered by Satan to perform miracles to deceive the people. Jesus warned this would happen.
 - b. **Matthew 24:24** “For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”
6. It forced people to worship Rome or be killed (v. 15).
- a. **Revelation 13:15** “It was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”
 - b. By enforcing Rome’s will on the Jewish people, the chief priests made the Roman emperor a very living thing, a living reality to the people in Israel.
- v. The land beast was the Jewish priesthood, the chief priests who led the Jews to reject Christ, to murder Him, and then to persecute His followers.
- vi. Remember that until AD 64, for the first thirty years of Christianity, it was the Jews, not the Romans, who persecuted the Christians. But they did so under Rome’s authority.

III. CONCLUSION

1. Revelation 13 presents the three great enemies of the church in the first century. The dragon – Satan, the sea beast – Rome and its emperor

- Nero, and the land beast – the Jewish priesthood. These three worked together to terrorize the Christians in the first century.
2. The beast of Revelation is not an end-times Antichrist that you need to be watching out for. And the mark of the beast is not the vaccine, or a microchip. The beast was Nero, the Roman emperor who lived when Revelation was being written, and who terrorized Christians. And the mark represented the worship of the beast. Those who refused to take the mark – to worship the emperor – were persecuted.