

What Does It Mean To

Refuse The Mark

Of The Beast?

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5/12/2002*

Refuse the Mark

Revelation 13:15-18

He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶ He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, ¹⁷ and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. ¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666 (Revelation 13:15-18).

I. The Mark of the Beast

Best Selling Books/Movies/Conferences

It is unlikely that a person could stroll too far through modern western evangelicalism without pretty rapidly coming face to face with the issue of “the mark of the beast.” The best selling Christian book in the entire decade of the seventies had the beast and his mark (666) as its central figure. A series of box office smash movies also took advantage of our society’s infatuation with this Biblical issue. Who can forget the movie, *The Omen*, when the father discovered the mark, 666, on the head of his son, Damien?

Christians, having been influenced by this high profile and very sensational point of view (with the best of intentions) placard their bumpers with stickers warning their potentially ill-fated friends to “REFUSE THE MARK.” By this they mean people should be careful to not take upon their hands or foreheads the number 666 in any fashion. If you take upon yourself the number of the beast, it is asserted, you seal your fate in hell. I would like to state that I whole-heartedly agree with the assertion that if you take upon your hand or forehead the mark of the beast, you have forfeited your soul. But what does it mean? How does a person take the mark of the beast upon his hand or forehead?

What the Mark Is Not

Let me start off by telling you what I don’t think the mark is: 1) I don’t think it has anything to do with your ATM card. I don’t think you have to worry about signing the wrong form at the bank and accidentally finding yourself in

the hands of Satan. 2) I don't think it has anything to do with bar codes at the supermarket. Since most of us have no idea how bar codes work, if Satan could trap us through bar codes it is probably too late for most of us. 3) I don't think it has anything to do with having your hand stamped at the return-to-the-park gate at Disneyland (this may sound silly but there are Christians who have been so full of sci-fi Christianity that they actually refuse to allow themselves or their kids to participate in this type of procedure). 4) I don't think it has anything to do with placing computer chips under your skin. I am not sure if I like the idea of having a computer chip under my skin, but I think that millions of pages of Christian literature devoted to admonishing Christians to stay away from subcutaneous computer chips are a waste of ink and paper.

II. The Mark of God

What we will find is that the mark of the beast is a satanic parody of the mark of God.

Jesus Writes His Name

Before we read of the mark of the beast in the Revelation, we read of the mark of Jesus.

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Revelation 3:12).

The Seal

Not too many people (in fact nobody I know of) interprets Revelation 3:12 to mean that we will actually have the name of Christ physically tattooed to our bodies. In Revelation 7 we see another similar reference.

Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed (Revelation 7:2-4).

Obviously, what John is recording here is not the mark of the beast but the mark of God. He associates putting His mark on His children with the term “sealed.” God seals His servants on their foreheads. What does this mean? Writing to Christians in Ephesus Paul, using the same word states,

In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13).

Paul uses the term again later in Ephesians.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).

A seal is a mark designating to whom someone or something belongs. It is generally associated with a king who melts wax and presses his royal seal upon it demonstrating his ownership of a letter or package. So this seal or mark symbolizes those who, as Paul writes (Ephesians 1:30), trust in Christ versus those who trust in the beast, thus receiving upon themselves the mark of the beast.

Hand and Forehead = Thought and Deed

Assuming that most of the people (at least the Christian leaders) receiving the Revelation would have a better understanding of the Old Testament than most Christians today, how would they have understood receiving a mark on their hands or foreheads? Moses records in Deuteronomy,

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 6:6-8).

To Whom Do You Belong?

The reference to the hand and forehead alluded to obedience to the law of God in thought and deed. So we have two marks for our consideration, the mark of God and the mark of the beast. The question then is, “in our thoughts and deeds, do we serve God or serve the beast?” Who is your master? To whom do you belong? To whom do you pledge allegiance by thought and deed? Who is your lord and master? Is it Christ or the beast?

God will mark those who are His and grant them protection. We read in Ezekiel,

Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who *had* the writer's inkhorn at his side; ⁴ and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it." ⁵ To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. ⁶ Utterly slay old *and* young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom *is* the mark; and begin at My sanctuary" (Ezekiel 9:3-6).

Having the mark of God upon you means that you are acceptable and HOLY TO THE LORD. In Exodus 28 we read that Aaron, representing the people, bore an engraving on his forehead. This was a sign of God granting them acceptability.

"You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, *like* the engraving of a signet: HOLINESS TO THE LORD. ³⁷And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. ³⁸ So it shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD" (Exodus 28:36-38).

I seem to have spoken more about having the mark of God on our hands and foreheads than refusing the mark of the beast. And maybe that is a good thing for us to concern ourselves with rather than falling into the trap of religious sensationalism – things which revolve around best-selling Christian pop-theology books and Hollywood versions of what God is all about. But for the sake of understanding, let us take a few minutes and see if we can be the people John writes about when he conveys, **"Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666."**

III. The Number of a Man

So many games, acrostics, anagrams, and speculations have been played with this number that I hesitate to make any suggestions at all. The bucket of silly theologians is full who were quite sure it must refer to: the Pope, Martin Luther, Napoleon, Hitler, Kissinger, Reagan, etc. There is one name, however,

that is quite closely related to this number. And it is a name that fits the historical context of the Revelation. It is Nero Caesar. In Hebrew there are no numbers. The alphabet serves a double duty for letters and numbers. It just so happens that the numerical value of Hebrew letters for the name of Nero Caesar adds up to 666. And I do think that Hebrew Christians could calculate that quite easily if they had an understanding of Hebrew, which they did. But let's leave that alone for a while (even though I think it is the most obvious answer) and look at what it all signifies.

The Number of a Man

Six is the number of a man. It was on the sixth day that God created man (Genesis 1:24-31.) Six days men are to labor but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord (Exodus 20:8-11). The Hebrew slave was in bondage six years before his release in the seventh year. And if all this isn't clear enough John tells us in the very passage before us that six is the number of a man.

No matter how many times six is repeated it will always be six and never seven; seven being the number of divinity, completion, and perfection!¹ The threefold repetition of six reveals man's full-scale opposition to God. It is the sin of sins, men wanting to be God. Six will only ever be six. No matter how many times you repeat six it will never be seven. We see this theme riddled through scripture. In 1 Samuel we read of Goliath,

Goliath

And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height *was* six cubits and a span (1 Samuel 17:4).

Here we see the ancient enemy of God's people represented as being six cubits tall and a span—six, plus a hand grasping for more. Of course the seed of the woman destroys him by inflicting a head wound. The victory of Christ prophesied in Genesis 3 is foreshadowed by this event.

Nebuchadnezzar/Solomon

Again we read of Nebuchadnezzar erecting an image of himself,

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height *was* sixty cubits *and* its width six cubits (Daniel 3:1).

¹ This is a common understanding of the number seven by virtually all Biblical scholars.

At the beginning of the downfall of Israel Solomon received 666 talents of gold (1 Kings 10:14). I won't bother going into every example of 666. Suffice it to say 666 is a sign of man in opposition to God.

Rome

At the time of the writing of the Revelation the epitome of man's power was found in the dominion of the Roman Empire – a government that was, and still is considered by man, the most powerful human government ever assembled. To serve God, thus receiving His mark, meant hardship. To serve Rome, thus receiving Rome's mark, meant temporary ease. Perhaps the most blatant passage of scripture ever given as a demonstration of taking the mark of the beast is given in John 19. Jesus, who is called the light, came into world but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. So when Jesus, God incarnate, stood trial before men the dialogue went like this,

From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." ¹³ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, *Gabbatha*. ¹⁴ Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵ But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:12-15).

Faith in Man or God?

My friends, we live, once again, in an era when government wants to be our savior. They want to educate us, feed us, clothe us, and give us health care. We are called to pledge to the government primary allegiance. Rome and Nero sought to instill this allegiance through fear of death. Today it is fear of being neglected. But whether it is human government, human philosophy, human ambition, human effort, or any other human endeavor, it all amounts to a ploy devised by the enemy of our souls to win our devotion. Six, even if you lay a million of them side by side, will never be more than six. It will never be seven. Don't worry about technology and computer chips. You must ask yourself *today* whose mark you bear. Is your faith in men? Is your faith in yourself? You are, after all, only a man. Or are you sealed by the living God unto salvation? To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to have His name, His mark upon you. And the angel of God's judgment spares all who bear His name.