

The Mark of the Beast

As technology develops, more and more Christians are affirming that the mark of the beast involves microchipping people so that to function socially (e.g. buying and selling) they must be part of the global corporate elite system. Today this involves a small transmitting device coded individually to you that works like an ID Card and a credit card.

Is this what God intends us to understand from the text? I think not; here is my explanation.

All the occurrences of the mark of the beast

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. 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. 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, 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. 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. Rev 13:11-18

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Rev 14:9-12

And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvellous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints! Rev 15:2-3

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth." So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Rev 16:1-2

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. Rev 19:20

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had

not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Rev 20:4-5

The mark

We must first evaluate the meaning of the word translated as ‘mark’.

The word, in all the above cases, is the Greek word *charagma* [Strong’s 5480]. It means: a stamp, an imprinted mark, the mark branded upon horses, something carved, a sculpture, or a graven work.

The point of this word is that the mark is like a brand on a horse; it is a declaration of ownership. It is something visible that identifies a person in allegiance with something.

We could also mention the ancient practice of branding slaves with the mark of their master or the branding of defeated armies that defected to the victor. Soldiers in the Roman army were often branded with the name of their legion or cohort. Some priests of pagan religious cults also branded themselves in the name of their god. There were many examples of human branding that John was familiar with and it always expressed possession by someone. The mark is about ownership; it tells us whom the person marked is submitted to.

Note

For those who think the mark is a microchip, this is a problem. Microchips are hidden within the flesh, the whole point of the beast’s mark is that it is open and obvious; a declaration of allegiance.

In earlier days it was posited that the precursor of the microchip, the bar code, was how the technology would work and it was suggested that everyone would be branded with such a bar code. This was more in keeping with Revelation. However, this technology is now obsolete and ineffective on skin. The hidden microchip hardly accords with what the text is saying.

Now the technology is already available for people to be microchipped and to buy items without a credit card. But this has no bearing on what Revelation is saying.

The explanation

To whom is Revelation intended?

Revelation is a book for the whole church and the only book that has an automatic blessing if one reads it.¹ In fact we are told by John that he considered the time of fulfilment to be near (1:3).

The purpose of the Revelation is to provide comfort and encouragement to a suffering church that, although times are hard, God is in complete control. It explains that the suffering of the saints is part of a spiritual warfare between God and the devil and in every sphere God is fully victorious and the devil is doomed.

¹ Rev 1:3, ‘Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near’.

It also explains various aspects of this warfare in a series of cyclical visions that run parallel. It is not a chronological sequence of events.

Thus the exhortations and warnings in Revelation are for the whole church in every time in order to find comfort and assurance that God is victor.

Now some aspects of the prophecy refer to specific times, such as those regarding Babylon as a picture of the world at the end under an antichristian government. However, in general, the whole book is to encourage the whole historic church.

If the mention of the mark was related to certain advances in technology and to understand its meaning you needed to know about this technology, then the many mentions of the mark would be unintelligible to most Christians throughout most of church history. Indeed, it would be unknown by anyone living before about ten years ago. This is a serious reason why interpreting the mark as a microchip is on dodgy ground.

The symbolic nature of the text

We have to interpret Revelation in its context, which is symbolic, allegorical, dramatic, poetic and apocalyptic. We must not take verses literally unless there is good reason to do so.

In this case, the mark is demanded by the false prophet, the second-in-command of the man of lawlessness (the first beast). This is a man or a system; but these texts tell us that he has two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon. These descriptions are not meant to be taken literally; neither is the mark, which is mentioned in that same context.

[Aside: the symbolism is, the false prophet has the appearance of a lamb, of a Christian, but with great power (two horns), when in fact he is devilish, his teaching is from the dragon (Satan). It is possible, as many, to see this type as a figure of the Roman church centred in the pope or better, all false teachers in the church.]

The chief characters involved – the unholy trinity

The dragon

This is Satan, the devil. A counterfeit of the Father.

The first beast out of the sea

This is the man of sin, the Antichrist (either individual or corporate) who arises out of the sea of humanity, the raging peoples. ['Sea' typifies nations: Isa 17:12.] A counterfeit of the Son.

The second beast, the false prophet²

This beast comes out of the earth and is the executor of the first beast. The earth here symbolises religious power, earthly religion. [NB Jm 3:15.] A counterfeit of the Holy Spirit.

The second beast is a religious figure (the false prophet) pretending to be a messenger of Christ (lamb) but he speaks the words of the devil (dragon). This is the voice of deception in the church. It can be the representation of all false teachers and false prophets out of the church. [Note the warnings about false prophets by Jesus (e.g. Matt 7:15), Paul (e.g. 2 Cor 11:13-15) and John (1 Jn 2:18, 4:1).]

The chief function of the second beast is to promote the worship of the first beast.

² This beast is identified as the false prophet in Rev 16:13, 19:20, 20:10.

Both beasts are agents of the devil and their purpose is to promote paganism, idolatry, blasphemy and wickedness. In general they are together the antichristian kingdom throughout history. In the final culmination of antichristian government, the fascist global kingdom will have a distinct evil political arm supported by an unrighteous religious arm.

The strategy of Satan is to destroy the image of God on the earth (seen in the church) and to promote the image of Satan. This is symbolised in Revelation as the setting up of an idol (13:14).

Who has this mark?

In short, worshippers of the beast; ‘if anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand’ and ‘the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image’.

These people are also the deceived, deluded in their following of the beast, ‘he [the false prophet, the second beast] deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image’.

So the mark cannot be upon elect people that worship Jesus Christ. It is only upon worshippers of the beast. In fact, the mark identifies worshippers of the beast, those who are deceived by the beast.

What symbolism is involved?

The two symbolic characteristics connected to the mark are the forehead and the hands.

The forehead symbolises the mind. Those with the mark are mentally submitted to the first beast (and thus the dragon [Satan] through him). It means devilish thinking; deceived thinking, twisted understanding, the intellect submitted to the devil.

The hands represent work and action. This is work that is done in the name of the beast; devilish work. The ‘right hand’ signifies employment.

Taken together, the mark is very simple; it is simply the indication of those who follow the beast and worship it, those who are submitted to the beast. We could summarise the mark as the giving over of the heart to Satan.

The forbidding of buying and selling could be: a) economics; that is Christians will be excluded from social interaction without worshipping the beast; b) the forbidding of religious practice other than that of the false prophet (worship of the first beast). Those who follow the beast gain secular advantages in life and the social order.

In essence, the mark of the beast is therefore the acceptance of humanism, self-worship, idolatry and false teaching which leads to a worship of the beast (and thus Satan).

It is possible that in the final antichristian kingdom this may be a physical mark to identify Satan’s followers and make survival difficult for Christians. Some good expositors do take this view (such as Herman Hoeksema). But the context of Revelation is symbolic and thus many sound commentators (such as PE Hughes) take it as the inner mark of unbelievers (see later).

There have been times in history when Christians have been forced into the open by some iniquitous methods, such as the Imperial Roman law to worship Caesar as god on pain of death by boiling oil, or compulsion to swear allegiance to the pope during persecution of British Protestants on pain of death by the rack.

The position of the elect

God's elect are sealed on their foreheads (7:3ff.); that is their minds are submitted to God; they are known by God and secure in his sovereignty. The inner man is secured by salvation in Christ; sealed unto God by the Holy Spirit.

The mark of the beast is a counterfeit of this sealing, securing the minds of men to his rule.

Is the mark subjective or objective?

Now I said earlier, in discussing the facts about the word 'mark' that it is something visible and seen, not a hidden microchip. I need to qualify that.

Since the mark is clearly an indication of submission to Satan through the beast, a heart that is given over to the devil, it is chiefly an internal matter not a literal external mark. However, what is clear is that those with the mark make their allegiance visible by their character. What those with the mark do is they display in their ideas, their words, their shared thoughts, their personality and their actions who their master is. Although there is no physical mark, those with the mark are clearly visible.

Remember that this passage must have application to saints throughout history; that was its purpose. Furthermore, the description of the first beast in chapter 13 shows us that this beast was operating throughout history. It was manifested in the Greek, Persian and Roman Empires (the leopard, bear and lion).³ Essentially it is saying that all human kingdoms are manifestations of the beast; earthly empires have the characteristics of the beast (swift, powerful and ferocious). People who make the mark a physical object given during the final kingdom limit the application of this important chapter to a tiny faction of world history. This cannot be correct. Saints have always been persecuted since the time of Abel.

Now throughout history the mark has been internal; the commitment to the beast (and thus Satan) was a heart given over to evil and not God. This commitment then manifests itself in external characteristics (such as sin and rebellion) so that the allegiance to Satan is visible.

However, at the end, when all things are concentrated and the worldwide commitment to rebellion against God is at its zenith, it is possible that there is an external mark or branding that occurs to identify enemies of the state (such as the marking of Jews in WWII). When Satan is released from divine bondage and is allowed to fully deceive the nations in a fascist antichristian state, there may be a physical application of this inward mark.

Interpretations of various commentators

- Albert Barnes (1798-1870; moderate Reformed Presbyterian): a physical, indelible mark as a symbol of papal authority. [Notes on the NT.]
- Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965; consistent Reformed, USA-Dutch Presbyterian): in general, the notable difference between Christians and those in the world; also a physical mark to identify followers of the beast in a final totalitarian state. ['The Mark of the Beast' (pamphlet) and 'Behold He Cometh', commentary.]

³ Rev 13:2 'Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority'. Compare Daniel 7 where the lion is the symbol of Babylonia; the bear of the Medo-Persian Empire; the leopard of the Macedonian (Greek); and a fierce, cruel, mighty animal with two horns as the symbol of the Roman.

- PE Hughes (1915- 1990; Episcopalian): the mark of a heart committed to following Satan. [‘The Book of the Revelation’, IVP.]
- Adam Clarke (1762-1832; Arminian Methodist): Latin worship in the papal system. [‘Commentary on the Bible.’]
- JN Darby (1800-1882; Brethren): s stamp imprinted by the empire of the beast. [‘Synopsis of the Bible’.]
- John Gill (1697-1771; Calvinistic Baptist): submission to the Roman Church. [‘Exposition of the Whole Bible’.]
- Matthew Henry (1662-1714; Anglican): submission to the papacy. [‘Commentary on the Whole Bible’.]
- R Jamieson, AR Fausset & D Brown (Anglican): a brand. [‘Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible’.]
- People’s New Testament: an indelible mark or brand, possibly related to the Roman Church.
- AT Robertson’s ‘Word Pictures’ (1863-1934; Baptist Greek scholar): a brand or mark.
- CI Scofield Bible Notes (1843-1921; Dispensational): the mark is the denial of Christian truth, especially the eternal Sonship and incarnation of Christ.
- John Walvoord (1910-2002; Dispensational theologian): a token of worshippers of the beast being identification necessary to conduct business. [‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ’]
- JPM Sweet (1927-2009; Anglican): non-committal. [‘Revelation’]
- GB Caird (1917-1984; Oxford academic): an invisible sign. [‘Revelation of St John the Divine’]
- Richard Brooks (Reformed evangelical): a mark of the beast’s ownership; not a physical mark. [‘The Lamb is All the Glory’, Welwyn Commentary Series.]
- Michael Wilcock (Anglican): a mystical mark showing allegiance to the beast’s system. [‘I Saw Heaven Opened’, IVP.]
- W Hendriksen (1900-1982; Reformed Presbyterian): an inward sign of ownership by the beast. [‘More Than Conquerors’, commentary on Revelation.]
- CD Alexander (1904-1991; Reformed Baptist): acceptance and worship of the beast as representative of the papacy. [‘Revelation Spiritually Understood’.]
- Matthew Poole (1624-1679; Anglican): the imposition and profession of the Roman faith. [‘Commentary on the Holy Bible’.]
- GR Beasley-Murray (1916-2000; Baptist): distinguishes the notion of the mark from its identification. He explains historic cases of branding that led to persecution⁴ but does not commit himself to a specific meaning. [‘Revelation’, the New Century Bible Commentary’.]
- GR Beasley Murray: Counterfeit of the sealing of the saints, showing allegiance to the beast. [‘The New Bible Commentary’, IVF.]
- Henry Alford (1810-1871; Anglican Greek scholar): a figurative mark or brand containing a number or name i.e. conformity to the beast. [‘The New Testament in Greek’]
- C Wordsworth (1807-1885; Anglican scholar): an emblem of the papacy. [‘Greek New Testament’]
- John Trapp (1601-1669; Anglican Puritan): submission to the pope. [‘Annotations upon the Old and New Testament’.]
- JA Bengel (1687-1752; Lutheran): no comment made. [‘Exegetical Annotations on the New Testament’.]
- HE Ryle (ed.) Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (1883; Anglican). A brand. [Cambridge University Press.]

⁴ Such as the Jews that refrained from offering pagan sacrifices under Ptolemy IV Philopater who were branded with an ivy leaf, a symbol of Bacchus or Dionysus (Maccabees 2:28-30).

- CJ Ellicott (1819-1905; Anglican). Inward acquiescence to the beast as a tyrannical world power. [‘Ellicott’s Bible Commentary for English Readers’.]
- RCH Lenski (1864-1936; Lutheran): the counterpart to the sealing of the saints in Christ’s name. [‘The Interpretation of St John’s Revelation’.]
- JR Dummelow (ed. liberal Anglican): A certificate issued by the Roman Empire under Nero enabling people to buy and sell. [‘A Commentary on the Holy Bible’, 1909.]
- Bishop Newton (Anglican): Submission to the pope. NB the historic examples of papal decrees forbidding assistance to ‘heretics’. [‘A guide to the Apocalypse’; 1782.]
- JL Thompson (Anglican): A counterfeit of the sealing of the saints. [‘The Glorious Future or The Key to Revelation’.]
- GB Wilson (moderate Reformed evangelical): Partaking of the character of the beast. [‘Revelation’.]
- Warren W Wiersbe (1929-now; Baptist): Submission to the beast. Speculates that the mark may, in future, be a number of identification. [‘The Bible Exposition Commentary’.]

666

The mark is identical with the name of the beast (13:16-18, 15:2-3). The number of its name is 666.

This number, like virtually all other numbers in Revelation, is not to be taken literally. It is symbolic and it requires understanding to fathom it.

We do not use Jewish gematria to interpret this; this is where letters are given numerical values. Using this type of system hundreds of interpretations have been given which are completely subjective and contradictory. Thus 666 can be forced to mean absolutely anything. Candidates for the meaning have been Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon, Nero, Caligula, Archbishop Laud or even John Wesley.⁵

In fact, we are told that 666 is the number of man (note, not ‘a’ man; Rev 13:18). In the Bible 6 is symbolically taken for mankind, falling short of 7 (divine perfection) and created on the 6th day. The triune sixes therefore represent an unholy trinity, man trying to be God – the original sinful temptation and the basis of paganism. It is man as the counterfeit god; his own idol.

Thus the characteristic of 666 (man trying to be god) equates with the mark of the beast (man submitted to Satan).

This is the conclusion of the world: mankind given over to Satan, killing the church and devoting human energies to the promotion of self-godlikeness. It is the whole world of men pretending to be as god and acting like God in full submission to the devil. When this is complete, Jesus returns and destroys the enemy with the mere breath of his mouth (2 Thess 2:8).

Why the mark is not a microchip

The mark is the name and/or the number of the beast. The mark identifies the beast and thus wearers of the mark show their allegiance to the beast. However, microchips do not identify the state but the individual; the chips identify the personal identity of the citizen and every chip identifies a different person.

⁵ The method is to identify a culprit, such as Emperors Nero or Caligula, and then determine their name in Greek, or even Hebrew or Latin (despite the NT being written in Greek), and then try to make the letters of the name add up to 666. Often people need to omit a letter to do this. Clearly this is nonsense.

The mark is also the number of the beast, 666; microchips will have a multi-digit individual number.

The mark appears on the hand or the forehead. No one has ever suggested a microchip implanted in a human forehead; indeed that is likely to be injurious to the person.

Every time there is an advance in technology the mark changes for many commentators that make the mark a literal object. In the past it was an indelible mark or a brand, then it was a tattooed bar-code, now it is a microchip. This shows how lowering the level of symbolic interpretation fails constantly.

The mark is a counterfeit or parody of the sealing of the saints. The sealing of the saints is not an external, physical mark but the internal operation of the Holy Spirit sealing people unto Christ. Similarly, the mark of the beast is an internal indication of possession by the beast, and thus by Satan.

The general drift

The activity of the two beasts is determined on one goal – the eradication of genuine Christianity from the earth and the complete establishment of the kingdom of Satan. The mark is but one means of achieving this. Other enterprises include the speaking image (13:15), for example, which is to do with surveillance within the home in order to identify Christians.⁶ The purpose behind it all is to get rid of the church.

Those Christians today who support national governments and global corporatism, thinking that they are benign, need to realise that the controlling elite, the power behind governments and corporatism, is out to kill you.

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. Rev 13:15

Conclusion

It is a great mistake to try to take Revelation literally and many expositors have been found wanting through doing this over centuries. Dates for the end of the world have come and gone. Antichrist has been identified as men who are now dead (such as Napoleon). People have even drawn objects mentioned as if they were real, such as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns (12:3). Movies have been made that are just stupid, such as one thriller in which Christians that got captured and branded with a hot iron marked '666' lost their salvation.

Revelation must be understood by its own rules and interpreted symbols give us many clues (e.g. 17:9-12).

According to the common sense approach, and following John himself, we see that the mark is something applicable to the church of all ages. It is the giving over of the heart to Satan through his agents, such as false teachers. This comes to a culmination in a final

⁶ The image hears, records and speaks to identify Christians for killing. This is well underway already with government surveillance of our landline telephone calls, emails, cell-phone use, web browsing history and smart televisions that can respond to the viewer and react. First the elite create terrorist attacks then use this pretext as a means to introduce draconian legislation, such as social spy networks, unlawful detention, deleting alternative news media or banning association.

totalitarian satanic government, but the principle applies throughout history. It is identification with Satan existing in all that worship him and selfishness.

The root of this allegiance is the age-old sin that began in Eden – the temptation to think that you can become God.

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God **for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Rm 1:24-25⁷**

Selfishness and pride are the chief characteristics of the mark of the beast; and these are the root of all other sins.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982



⁷ Note that most translations (including the KJV) are wrong in this connection. The Greek is ‘the lie’ not ‘a lie’,