

Revelation

*Part Forty
Refuse the Mark
(Revelation 13:16-18)*

With Study Questions

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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 13:16-18).

Introduction

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 influenced by this 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.

The Mark of God

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

Not too many people (in fact nobody I've read) 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.” ⁴ And 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. ⁷ “You 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).

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.³⁷ “And 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’ve seemed to have written 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”**

Let Us Calculate

So many games, acrostics, anagrams and speculations have been played with this number that I hesitate to make suggestions at all. The bucket of guesses include: 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 which fits the historical context of the Revelation. It’s Nero Caesar.

In Hebrew there are no numbers. The alphabet serves a double duty for letters and numbers.¹ For example, on the wall of Pompei was found an inscription which read, “I love her whose name is 545.” 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 understood Hebrew, which many of them did. John is

¹ The technical term for this is gematria.

appealing to those who could, with the words, **“Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast.”** It is highly unlikely that any of John’s readers in the first century would have gone home that night, put their minds to this task and concluded that it was Henry Kissinger.

Certainly, there were a number of names one could make fit into the 666. But it narrows down when we cross-reference this with another passage in Revelation where John also appeals to **“the mind which has wisdom” (Revelation 17:9).**

There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time (Revelation 17:10).

In Revelation 17:10 we learn who the current king is. It’s the sixth. **“Five have fallen, one is.”** The order of the Caesars was: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, then Nero was sixth. Interestingly, Galba was next and ruled only seven months, i.e., **“a short time.”** All this to say that this most obvious answer to who the beast is would be Nero.

And the ability in first century Rome to **“buy or sell”** was often contingent upon some public display of allegiance to Caesar. Caesar was a political figure, a religious figure and a cultural\economic figure. The empire had their finger on every aspect of a person’s life.

But let’s leave that alone for a while and seek an application which extends beyond the first century. Rome and all its Caesars are in the wind. But we should ever learn from the inspired counsel provided by the Spirit of God when we find ourselves moving in a similar direction.

What is universally and historically ubiquitous about this number?

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 never be seven; seven being the number of divinity, completion and perfection². The threefold repetition of six reveals man's full-scale opposition to God. It is the sin of sins; men wanting to be God. We see this theme riddled through scripture. In 1 Samuel we read of 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.

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).

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 by many, considered the most powerful human government ever assembled. To serve God, thus receiving God's mark, meant hardship. To serve Rome, thus receiving Rome's mark (the mark of the beast), 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

² This is a common understanding of the number seven by virtually all Biblical scholars.

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 our primary allegiance. Rome and Nero sought to instill this allegiance through fear of death. Today it is fear of being neglected, losing jobs, being labeled hateful, etc.

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 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.

Questions for Study

1. How have you understood the mark of the beast? Why do you suppose it is so intriguing (page 2)?
2. Can you name some of the suggestions regarding what the mark of the beast is? Do these suggestions have merit? Why or why not (pages 3, 4)?
3. What are some of the examples we see in the Bible of the mark of God? Do you think these are physical marks? Explain (pages 3, 4).
4. What is the significance of the hand and the forehead (pages 4-6)?
5. In what ways does Nero fit into the calculation of the beast (pages 6, 7)?
6. Discuss various ways we can understand “the number of a man” (pages 7, 8).
7. How did Rome convince the religious community to take the mark of the beast? Whose mark is on you and how do you know (pages 8, 9)?