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The Mark Of The Beast



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† There's a lot of noise in dispensationalism about the mark of the beast. We're repeatedly told that it's right around the corner, that a new technology might be the mark, that a computer chip might be the mark, that a digital identification system might be the mark, or that some future world government will force everyone to receive 666.

† But Revelation wasn't written to frighten Christians two thousand years later about technology John never mentioned. It

was written to seven real churches in Asia who were facing real pressures in their own time.

† The first thing we should ask isn't, What modern invention could become the mark? The first question should be, What did John tell his original readers?

† Revelation identifies the mark with the beast's name and the number of his name. It connects the mark with worship, allegiance, economic pressure, persecution, and the number of a man (Revelation 13:15; Revelation 14:9-11).

† The book also establishes its own time frame. These things were to happen shortly, the time was near, and the original churches were expected to understand and obey the prophecy (Revelation 22:6, 10).

† The mark of the beast isn't an imminent threat to Christians today. It belonged to the first-century conflict described in Revelation.

Revelation 1:1-3

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

† Before interpreting the mark, we have to respect Revelation's own time statements. John didn't say these things would begin thousands of years later. He said they must shortly take place.

† John also said the time was at hand. That statement mattered to the seven churches receiving the book. They weren't being warned about computers, microchips, bar codes, digital currency, biometric identification, or technology that wouldn't exist for centuries.

† This immediately creates a serious problem for the dispensational interpretation. If the mark belongs exclusively to our future, then shortly and at hand lose their natural meaning (Revelation 22:6, 10).

† We don't need today's newspaper to interpret Revelation. We need Revelation's original audience, historical setting, Old Testament imagery, and its own inspired time statements.

Revelation 13:16-18

And he causes all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, and the free and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, and he decrees that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either 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 the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

† Notice exactly what Scripture says. The mark is connected with the name of the beast and the number of his name. John doesn't identify it as a computer chip, vaccine, credit card, bar code, digital currency, or electronic implant.

† John says the number is the number of a man. He then tells his readers to calculate it. That means the number carried meaning that John's original audience could understand.

† The number 666 has long been connected with Nero Caesar. When the form Neron Caesar is represented in Hebrew letters and those letters are given their numerical values, the total is 666. This fits the Roman setting of Revelation and the persecution associated with Nero.

† The economic language is also important. Refusing allegiance to the beast brought real social and economic consequences. Buying and selling weren't presented as evidence of twenty-first-century technology. Economic exclusion was part of the pressure to conform to the beast's authority.

† Revelation isn't warning us that we'll accidentally receive the mark while buying groceries. Receiving the mark is connected with allegiance to the beast and worship of his image (Revelation 14:9-11).

Revelation 14:9-12

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a

loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will 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; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

† Here Scripture interprets Scripture. The mark isn't separated from worship. John repeatedly joins receiving the mark with worshipping the beast and his image.

† This wasn't about somebody unknowingly receiving a technological device. The issue was loyalty. Whom would people serve? Would they submit to the beastly power opposing God's people, or remain faithful to Christ?

† The saints are contrasted with the worshipers of the beast. The faithful keep God's commandments and their faith in Jesus. Revelation presents two opposing allegiances (Revelation 7:3; Revelation 14:1).

† That's why turning the mark into every new technology that appears misses John's point. The central issue wasn't technology, it was worship and allegiance.

Revelation 15:2

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that come off victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the sea of glass, having harps of God.

† John saw people who had victory over the beast, his image, and the number of his name. These weren't Christians living thousands of years after the seven churches. They belonged to the conflict Revelation was describing to its first-century audience.

† They overcame because they refused the beast's demand for allegiance. Revelation doesn't picture faithful believers

desperately trying to identify a future electronic device. It pictures saints remaining faithful during persecution (Revelation 12:11).

† The beast could persecute them, pressure them, and even kill them, but it couldn't take away their victory in Christ.

Revelation 17:9-10

And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who were victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

† Revelation gives geographical and political clues about the beast. The seven heads represent seven mountains and seven kings. This points us into John's world, not ours.

† Most importantly, John says five kings had fallen and one is. That language places the vision within an existing sequence of rulers. John wasn't describing a political ruler who wouldn't appear for another two thousand years.

† Rome was famously associated with seven hills, and the Roman imperial setting fits the beast imagery throughout Revelation. The beast represented persecuting imperial power, with Nero providing a compelling historical identification for the man associated with 666.

† John told his readers to use wisdom because the clues had meaning in their historical world (Revelation 13:18).

Revelation 19:19-20

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse, and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire, which burns with brimstone.

† The story doesn't leave the beast undefeated and waiting to return in our generation. Revelation shows the beast judged.

† Notice again how receiving the mark and worshiping the

image appear together. This consistent connection makes it impossible to reduce the mark to modern technology.

† The beast's authority wasn't permanent. God's judgment brought that persecuting power to its appointed end.

Revelation's message to suffering believers was ultimately a message of victory (Revelation 12:10-11).

Revelation 20:4

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their foreheads and on their hands; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

† These believers faced the beast and refused his mark. Some paid for their faithfulness with their lives. That makes the mark part of an actual persecution experienced by God's people in the world Revelation addressed.

† Their refusal to receive the mark demonstrated their loyalty to Christ. They wouldn't worship the beast or submit spiritually to his claims.

† Revelation honors them as victors, not victims. Rome could kill their bodies, but it couldn't remove them from Christ's kingdom or prevent them from reigning with Him.

Historical References

† Tacitus records Nero's brutal persecution of Christians at Rome after the great fire in AD 64. Christians were arrested, mocked, tortured, burned, and killed. His account confirms the violent imperial environment in which allegiance to Christ could carry deadly consequences.

† Suetonius also records punishment inflicted upon Christians during Nero's reign. His testimony independently confirms that Christians were being targeted by Roman authority.

† The Roman world also practiced emperor veneration, and imperial loyalty could become intertwined with public, civic, and

economic life. Revelation's language about worship, allegiance, persecution, and economic pressure fits that first-century environment.

† These historical witnesses don't replace Scripture. They help confirm that the world Revelation describes wasn't imaginary and doesn't need to be transported into the twenty-first century to make sense.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Christians today don't need to live in fear that they're about to accidentally receive the mark of the beast.

† We don't need to label every new technology 666. Credit cards weren't the mark. Bar codes weren't the mark. Social Security numbers weren't the mark. Computer chips aren't the mark. Digital currency isn't automatically the mark. Scripture never tells us to identify the mark by watching technological developments.

† Dispensationalism keeps moving the mark into the future because its prophetic system requires a future beast, future tribulation, and future fulfillment of Revelation. But Revelation itself said the events were near and would shortly take place (Revelation 1:1, 3).

† When each generation is told that the mark is imminent, Christians can spend their lives fearing something Revelation's first readers were already warned about.

† The lasting lesson isn't fear of technology. It's faithfulness to Christ. God's people belong to Christ, and no political power, economic system, government, or earthly kingdom deserves the worship that belongs to God.

† The beast didn't win. Christ did. The persecuted saints weren't abandoned. They overcame. The kingdom wasn't defeated. Christ reigns.

† We aren't waiting for the beast to appear. We aren't waiting for 666 to become a worldwide technological system. We aren't waiting for Revelation's first-century warnings to suddenly become imminent two thousand years later.

† The mark of the beast belongs where John placed it, within

the first-century conflict between the beastly persecuting power and those who faithfully belonged to Christ.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Is the mark of the beast a future computer chip?

A: Scripture never says that. The mark is identified with the beast's name, the number of his name, and worship of the beast and his image (Revelation 13:16-18; Revelation 14:9-11).

Q: Could someone accidentally receive the mark?

A: Revelation connects receiving the mark with allegiance and worship. It isn't presented as something a faithful Christian unknowingly receives while using technology or participating in ordinary commerce (Revelation 14:9-12).

Q: Why is the number 666 important?

A: John says it's the number of a man and tells his readers to calculate it. The name Neron Caesar, when represented in Hebrew letters and calculated by their numerical values, produces 666, fitting Nero and the first-century Roman setting (Revelation 13:18).

Q: Why were the forehead and hand used?

A: Revelation deliberately contrasts the beast's mark with God's identification of His own people. God's servants are pictured as sealed on their foreheads, while the beast marks those aligned with him (Revelation 7:3; Revelation 14:1; Revelation 13:16).

Q: Does the mark of the beast still need to happen?

A: No. Revelation announced that its prophetic events must shortly take place and that the time was at hand. The beast, his persecution, his mark, and his judgment belong within that prophetic setting (Revelation 1:1-3; Revelation 19:19-20).

Q: Should Christians fear digital currency, biometric identification, or new technology because it might be the mark?

A: No. Christians should evaluate technology wisely, but

Revelation doesn't define the mark by technology. It defines it through the beast's name, number, worship, and allegiance (Revelation 13:16-18; Revelation 14:9-12).

Q: What should Christians learn from the mark of the beast today?

A: Remain faithful to Christ regardless of political, social, or economic pressure. The message of Revelation isn't that Christians should live frightened of 666. It's that Christ's people overcome through faithfulness to Him (Revelation 12:11; Revelation 15:2).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Revelation 1:1-3; Revelation 13:16-18; Revelation 14:9-12; Revelation 15:2; Revelation 17:9-10; Revelation 19:19-20; Revelation 20:4

† Historical writers: Tacitus, Annals; Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars

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