

## **Tough Topics: The Mark of the Lamb and the Beast in *Revelation***

### **Opening Comments:**

*Revelation* is written to the Church, that the Bride of Christ may remain faithful in a time of persecution and great apostasy. This is its overarching purpose. *Revelation* gives eternal assurance that those who do not fall away from the faith, even during a short time of suffering, **will live forever in eternal vindication**. *Revelation* is not written as a “roadmap” for the “end times” in the strictest sense.

### **Part One: The Passage You All Know (About)**

#### ***Revelation* 13:11-18:**

*Then I saw **another beast** rising out of the earth. **It had two horns like a lamb** and it **spoke like a dragon**. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast **it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived**. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, **to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name**. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate **the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666**.*

Consideration of the above leads to some questions. We will not be able to answer many. We will focus on three key ones:

1. Who is the beast?
2. Who is the Lamb?
3. What are their marks?

### **Part Two: Context of the Letter and the Passage**

IF YOU REMEMBER NOTHING ELSE ABOUT THIS STUDY, REMEMBER THIS:  
**The rhetorical purpose of the Book of *Revelation* is to encourage the persecuted saints to persevere in the faith, no matter what might happen.**

*Revelation* 13:10b: *Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

*Revelation* 14:12: *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*

Therefore, the readers were being persecuted. When? For this bears on the answers to our questions as well. The two main (conservative) views are either:

- 66-69 AD (just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple)
- 95 AD (during the reign of Domitian with Jerusalem already being an ash heap).

### **Part Three: The Identity of the Beast(s) and Its Mark**

There are actually two “beasts” described in *Revelation*. Both are in chapter 13 (also 11:7). The language used here is heavily influenced by ***Daniel* 7:15ff**:

*As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. **These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.** But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.*

First important point—the beasts described in chapter 13 are not Satan (who is the Dragon in the near and broader context of the letter), **but political rulers under the influence of the dragon.**

We have a “beast out of the sea” and another beast “rising out of the earth”. They are different figures but related. There is a religious component to the activity of the second beast. While the first beast was a blasphemer and persecutor of the saints, the second beast will make the earth “worship the first beast”.

John is describing not a 21<sup>st</sup> century geo-political alliance, but a 1<sup>st</sup> century historical context. This is made clear in *Revelation 17:9-10*:

*This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.*

Seven mountains are referring to the seven hills of Rome. Likewise, the seven kings are the seven emperors of the Roman Empire—the Seven Caesars: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius had fallen. Nero was on the throne and Galba had not yet come...<sup>1</sup>but was only on the throne for seven months, or “a little while”. **It makes the most sense literarily, historically, typologically, and interpretatively to see the “beast from the earth” as describing the reign of Nero, who is on the throne.**

What then of the “mark”? **This is a symbolical reference to allegiance to the beast.** *It is likely not a physical brand or tattoo but a figurative choosing of whom to follow—the Beast or the Lamb.* Christians were forced to offer incense to Caesar and claim him as their god. Failure to do so led to death.

#### **Part Four: The Sealing of the People of God**

To understand the “mark of the beast” one must see it **over and against the seal or mark of the Lamb.** For the work of Satan and his minions are perversions and imitations of the true, authentic, life-giving work of Christ and the Holy Trinity. Earlier in we see the appearance of the Lamb.

##### ***Revelation 5:6-14:***

*And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

So, we know the Lamb (anticipating His mark in Chapter 14). Next we move to the “sealing” of the people of God.

##### ***Revelation 7:3-8:***

*After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, **with the seal of the living God,***

---

<sup>1</sup> If you follow the dating scheme I follow!

and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, **until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.**” And I heard the number of the sealed, **144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.** OT Background: Ezekiel 9:3-6:

*Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. And the Lord said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and **put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.**” And to the others he said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, **but touch no one on whom is the mark***

So, what is the “seal of the living God”? **It is the mark that signifies in a special way that the person sealed is God’s special property and represents God’s manner of identifying His people as His own for their protection and eternal welfare.**

#### **Part Four: Numbers in the Book of Revelation**

One of the difficulties with *Revelation* is the numbers. Generally speaking, **the numbers used in Revelation are figurative.** There are some basic ways to “read” numbers:

**The number 4**—generally means a complete coverage with respect to directions. Four is used to speak to all sides or directions being represented or the entirety of an area being covered. So, four winds, four directions, four sides of a square.

**The number 10**—represents a largeness, but usually with respect to the things of man or things of land. So, 10 (and its exponents) can represent *an entirety of something.*

**The number 7** represents the completion of something (not just quantity). Very often, 7 is talking of the things of the Divine (but not always!).

**The numbers of multiples**—very often symbolical numbers are cubed or multiplied. *The number 1000 is a common multiplier. 1000 is an unending or undefinable time or extent.* Symbolical numbers are also multiplied. There are other numbers too (12, 3).

What of the 144,000? **144,000 is a figurative number that represents “true Israel”, not based on ethnicity but on the new, spiritual relationship founded upon the blood of Christ.** 144,000 is a multiple of symbolic numbers. The 12 Tribes of Jacob (faithful remnant of the people of Israel) X 12 Apostles (faithful remnant of the Gentile inclusion) X 1000 (the myriads upon myriads; unnumberable) = 144,000. **Therefore, the number 144,000 is the fullness of the faithful remnant of the people of God.**

#### **Part Five: The Number of the Beast**

Again, *Revelation* 13:16-18:

*Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, **to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.** This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate **the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.***

In contrast to the number 7, 6 is one that lacks **completeness**. It is the number of man (13:18), who is created on the “sixth day”. John says this “calls for wisdom” and “let the one who has understanding calculate the number...” There is an expectation that John’s reader’s (at least some of them) *would be able to decipher what this number represents*. **So, what about 666, known as the number of the beast (and also the number of man)?** Two faithful ways of looking at it.

- **Historical Application**--Common in antiquity was the practice of *gematria*, which was *transforming names into numbers*. This was done by assigning letters of the alphabet numerical value. SEE DEMONSTRATION. Using this, Nero is the beast and his mark is to deny Christ and swear fealty to him. Note the date of the writing is a key.
- **Figurative Application**—over against the number 7 and its threefold referent of the Triune God, the number 6 three times can be seen to ape the divine and holy. The “unholy” trinity could refer to the Dragon and the first and second beast. 666 could be a number of man, or anything representing a mockery of the divine. Nero could fit as a “type”, as are other evil, political rulers through the ages.

### **Part Six: Bearing the Seal of the Living God**

The seal of God on the forehead is **a mark of identification that preserves the faithful from judgment**. In the midst of tribulation, the ones bearing the seal of God are spared.

#### **Revelation 9:1-6:**

*And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth...They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, **but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads**. They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.*

### **Part Seven: The Mark of the Lamb**

The next chapter after the mark of the beast gives the countervailing Mark of the Lamb.

#### **Revelation 14:1-5:**

*Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who **had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads**. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. **No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth**. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. **These have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless**.*

Last item: why the forehead and hand for the marks? The forehead represents our rational center and cognitive ability to discern. The hand represents the deeds we do. IOW, we might pledge allegiance to the Lamb but defile Him with our deeds.