

The Beast and Its Mark

Revelation 13

Revelation chapter 13 deals with two beasts that John sees in vision and a mark that the beast imposes. This chapter has raised a number of questions in people's minds: What is the mark of the beast? Is the mark some kind of government identification number like one's Social Security number? Is the mark of the beast like a bar code on a product in the grocery store that can be scanned? Is like a credit card? How does one receive this mark or how can one avoid receiving it?

Who or what is the beast? Is it a person—some sinister dictator or mafia boss? Is the beast a worldwide financial organization or some governmental power?

These questions have resulted in a lot of speculation. Many different answers have been given. Let's turn to the Bible itself and see exactly what Revelation 13 says. Let's see if God's Word can answer these questions and help us understand what God is trying to tell us in this chapter.

The Beast From the Sea

John writes,

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth was like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority (Revelation 13:1, 2).

Does this sound familiar? Where have we seen something like this before?

Remember in Daniel 7, the prophet had a vision in which he saw four beasts rising up out of the sea. The first three were like a lion, a bear, and a leopard (Daniel 7:1-6). We saw when studying Daniel 7 that the lion represented Babylon; the bear represented

Medo-Persia, and the leopard represented Greece. Daniel saw a fourth beast as well—”dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong” Daniel 7:7). We saw that this fourth beast symbolized the pagan Roman Empire. Daniel 7 also brings to view a “little horn” that grew out of the breakup of the Roman Empire (verse 8).

What does the sea represent? Revelation 17:15 tells us. “The waters which you saw . . . are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.” So the fact that this first beast of Revelation 13 rises out of the sea indicates that it will appear from among the established nations and populated areas of the world. In contrast, as we will see, the second beast of Revelation 13 rises from the earth (verse 11). This would indicate the opposite of the sea—those portions of the world without established nations and populations.

Parallels to the Vision of Daniel 7

It’s clear that the beast John saw rising up out of the sea has parallels to the vision Daniel saw of four beasts rising out of the sea as recorded in his book. It’s as if Revelations 13 is pointing us back to Daniel 7 as a means of helping us to identify this first beast. John goes on to give us a number of details about this beast and its activities:

And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:3-8).

Note the identifying characteristics of this first beast from the sea:

- The dragon gives the beast its power, throne, and authority (verse 2).
- All the world worships the beast (verses 3, 4, 8).
- It speaks “great things” and blasphemies (verse 5).
- It exercises authority for forty-two months (verse 5).
- It blasphemes God, His temple, and the inhabitants of heaven (verse 6).
- It makes war against God’s saints and overcomes them (verse 7).
- It exercises authority over every nation and group of people (verse 7).

Does any of this sound familiar? Going back to the parallels with Daniel 7, we note that this list mirrors the description Daniel gives of the little horn power brought to view in his vision.

- The beast speaks “great things and blasphemies” (Revelation 13:5). The little horn “speak[s] pompous words against the Most High” (Daniel 7:25).
- The beast makes war with the saints (Revelation 13:7). The little horn “persecute[s] the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:25).
- The beast is “given authority to continue for forty-two months” (Revelation 13:5). The little horn has authority “for a time and times and half a time” (Daniel 7:25).

Clearly, the beast John saw rising from the sea in Revelation 13 is the same power Daniel saw as a little horn growing out of the ten horns of the fourth beast—the pagan Roman Empire. The descriptions of the two are the same. They both exercise authority for the same time period—the 1,260 years from A.D. 538 to 1798. As we have seen, the prophetic periods of “forty-two months” and “time, times, and half a time” both equal 1,260 prophetic days or 1,260 actual years.

Identifying the Beast From the Sea

What is this power symbolized by a little horn in Daniel and a beast from the sea in Revelation? As we saw in Daniel 7, the power that exercised authority during this period

and made war with against God's faithful people was the church itself, fallen into apostasy and gross spiritual darkness.

"The dragon gave him [the beast] his power, his throne, and great authority" (Revelation 13:2). Satan himself worked through the medieval church to pervert the pure gospel of Jesus Christ and lead men and women away from the truth about salvation. The church taught that salvation comes through the church and its priesthood. It blasphemed by claiming the privileges and prerogatives of God. It claimed that it could forgive sins through the sacraments and the mass. It elevated its traditions and rituals above the Bible. It even attempted to change God's law—specifically the commandment dealing with time—the seventh-day Sabbath of the Bible. Instead, it instituted worship on Sunday, the first day of the week.

Another clue to the identity of the beast from the sea is found in Revelation 13:18. "Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." We have noted that in the Bible, seven is the number representing perfection. So the number six (one less than seven) would represent imperfection. Triple seven would denote triple perfection. Triple six, the number of the beast, would denote triple imperfection. Students of Revelation have pointed out the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* (Vicar of the Son of God) is one that has been ascribed to the popes of the Roman Church. The Latin letters in that title with numeric value add up to 666.

John further says of this beast, "I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast" (Revelation 13:3). Some have seen this "deadly wound" occurring when the French general, Berthier, took the pope captive in 1798 and brought him back to France where he died in captivity. It seemed that the power of the Roman Church was mortally wounded. Yet the prophecy predicts that this mortal wound would be healed and all the world would wonder after the beast and worship it.

Putting together all these identifying characteristics of this first beast in Revelation 13, and comparing them with Daniel's vision of the little horn in Daniel 7, leads to the conclusion that the beast John saw rising from the sea represents the Christian church itself, mired in apostasy during the spiritual darkness of the medieval period.

The Beast From the Earth

John writes,

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 might buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name (Revelation 13:11-18).

The first beast rose out of the sea; the second beast “comes up out of the earth” (verse 11). We said earlier that seas represent peoples and nations and multitudes (Revelation 17:15). Thus the earth, in contrast, would represent those portions of the earth where there are not multitudes and nations—a sparsely populated, undeveloped part of the world. This second beast arises at the close of the forty-two months during which the first beast exercises authority (verse 5). That is, it rises up around 1798. It emerges in a part of the world that is sparsely populated—one that is not part of the crowded struggling nations of the old world. What power fits those two criteria?

The United States of America declared its independence in 1776. It adopted its constitution in 1789 and was being recognized as a world power by the end of the 1700s. It arose in a part of the world that was sparsely populated and not part of the old world of people, nations, and multitudes.

John goes on to say, “He had two horns like a lamb and spoke as a dragon” (verse 11). Horns in Bible prophecy symbolize power—the power of the kingdom or nation being depicted. Notice this beast has no crowns on its horns. This indicates that this beast power is not a monarchy or a kingdom. “It had two horns like a lamb.” This signifies a young nation, peaceful nation. The two horns represent the two primary governing principles of the United States—political liberty and religious liberty. In the Old World there were established religions that were connected to the government. Citizens were taxed to support those churches. There were religious tests for political office. Religious dissidents were often oppressed and marginalized, if not directly persecuted. In this new, lamb-like nation of the United States, religious liberty flourished. Church and state were separated. Freedom of worship was guaranteed in its constitution. It spoke like a lamb.

A Lamb That Speaks Like a Dragon

Unfortunately, the prophecy does not end at this point. John says, “It had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon” (verse 11). What does this mean?

The dragon, as we have seen, is none other than Satan himself—that old serpent called the Devil (Revelation 12:9). In spite of its beginnings in religious liberty and freedom of worship, this lamb-like power, the Bible says, will end up speaking like the dragon. Revelation 13 says that this second beast, the United States of America will speak like the dragon in five ways:

1. It will exercise “all the authority of the first beast” (Revelation 13:12). It will abandon its principles of religious liberty and, like the first beast, will become a persecuting power that forces the conscience.
2. It will cause “the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast” (verse 12). The United States will take the lead in enforcing the authority of the first beast and in requiring everyone on earth to worship it by recognizing its spiritual and secular authority.
3. It will work signs and wonders to deceive the world into making an image to the first beast. What would constitute an “image” to the first beast? The first beast represents apostate Christianity, the medieval church that combined religious and secular power. The church that persecuted those who disagreed with her doctrines and practices. The

church that exalted human traditions and false doctrines above the Word of God. An image to that power would be a copy, a likeness, of it. According to this prophecy, the United States will combine the powers of the civil government with those of the religious authority of apostate Christianity to form an image to the beast—a union of church and state. It will require everyone to “worship” this image.

4. It will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (verse 15). The United States will become a persecuting power, passing laws to put to death those who refuse to recognize and follow (worship) the image to the beast that it has created. It will take the lead in enforcing these decrees worldwide.

5. Finally, it will cause “all . . . to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads” (verse 16). What is this mark of the beast?

The Mark of the Beast and the Seal of God

The book of Revelation is a book of contrasts—Babylon and the New Jerusalem, the dragon and the Lamb, the harvest of the saved and the harvest of the lost. One of the most significant of these contrasts is the one between the mark of the beast (Revelation 13) and the seal of God (Revelation 7). A “seal” and a “mark” are the same thing according to Romans 4:11. In order to understand the mark of the beast, we must first understand what the seal of God is. The Bible clearly identifies God’s seal or mark or sign. God says,

I also gave them [His people] My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. . . .
Hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and You, that you may know that I am the LORD your God” (Ezekiel 20:12, 20).

It [the Sabbath] is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested (Exodus 31:17).

Isaiah 8:16 says, “Seal the law among my disciples.” So God’s seal is found in connection with His law. What does a seal do? A seal authenticates a document; a seal

testifies that a document is legal. A seal consists of three elements—the name of the one issuing the seal, his or her title, and the location or area of the seal’s jurisdiction. For example, your high school diploma probably has a seal on which contains the name of the school superintendent or principal, the name of the school, and the city in which the school is located. God says that His seventh-day Sabbath is a sign, or seal, between Him and His people testifying that He is the One who sanctifies them. Isaiah says the seal is connected to God law. Can we find God’s seal in His law?

The fourth commandment of God’s law reads:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11).

Here in the Sabbath commandment we find the seal of the living God. It contains His name—“the LORD your God.” It contains His title—“Creator.” And it contains his jurisdiction—“the heavens and the earth.” God says the seventh-day Sabbath is a “sign” between Him and His people forever (Exodus 31:17). The Sabbath represents loyalty to God, it represents obedience to God. The Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Why? Because it is the seal of His authority.

Every Sabbath, as we worship the Creator, we praise Him and acknowledge that He created us. We show that we want to be His loyal servants obeying His law. The central issue regarding the mark of the beast is worship. It is a matter of worshiping the Creator or worshiping the beast (Revelation 13:15).

Identifying the Mark of the Beast

What then is the mark of the beast?

It is the opposite of God’s seal. It has to do with worship. It is an issue of worship. It concerns the law—God’s commandment to worship on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11)

versus the decree of the beast to worship its image (Revelation 13:15). So the mark of the beast involves a counterfeit to God's day of worship.

The Roman Church claims to have changed the observance of God's seventh-day Sabbath to worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. It points to this change as a sign of its authority in spiritual matters! "Sunday is our mark of authority," (*The Catholic Record*, September 1, 1923). God says, "The Sabbath is the seal of My authority." The Roman Church says, "Sunday is our mark of authority."

[The second beast] causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast. . . . 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 (Revelation 13:12, 15, 16).

The Bible predicts that the United States of America will link hands with Rome to create a church-state image of the Roman Church at a time of spiritual crisis. The historic freedoms of religious liberty will be eroded and abandoned. Church and state will unite to enforce Sunday worship in disobedience to God's commandment. The "mark" of the beast is the establishment of a counterfeit to God's day of worship that is set up by a union of church and state and enforced by law under the penalty of death.

The beast demands that everyone receive this mark—accept its counterfeit to God's day of worship—either on the forehead or the hand. The forehead represents the mind (Hebrews 10:16). Some will accept the mark of the beast with their minds. They believe it is necessary in order to regain God's favor. Others will accept the mark in their hand—not believing in the mind, but going along to get along and avoid the penalty of the law.

This does *not* mean that sincere Christians today who worship on Sunday have received the mark of the beast. The mark of the beast comes into being only when Sunday worship is enforced by law on pain of death. When that happens, each person will have to make a choice. Worship God or worship the beast. Receive God's seal or

receive the mark of the beast. That is why Revelation 13:10 says, “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”

God’s last-day people are patiently waiting for the coming of Jesus. They are keeping the commandments of God (Revelation 12:17). They love Jesus Christ with all their hearts. They keep his commandments with all their hearts.

The issue at the end of time will be one of worship. Worship of God or worship of the beast power. That is why in the next chapter of Revelation, God sends angels bearing a three-fold message to the whole world, calling on men and women everywhere to worship Him and prepare for the final harvest of the earth.