

The Mark of the Beast

End Times Series

By far the #1 issue concerning end times speculation that I hear is this: The implanted microchips are coming! That's the mark of the beast!!! And the typical response is, of course, 'I'm never letting anyone implant anything like that in me!'

And we have a whole segment of the American church ready to fight against microchip technology. Which is, unfortunately, not at all what the Bible is trying to teach us when it talks about the mark of the beast.

So tonight, our task is to address what the mark of the beast actually is. To do this, we must examine a much wider topic: sealing and marking in the Bible. Until you understand that background, you won't understand what is being distorted as a bad parody in the mark of the beast.

So here are the questions we will answer tonight:

1. What is the biblical background of sealing and marking?
2. Who is sealed and marked in Revelation?
3. What is the mark of the beast?
4. What should we learn from the mark of the beast?

Let's dive in.

1. What is the biblical background of sealing and marking?

There are three important biblical ideas about sealing and marking that you need to know.

- In Exodus 28:38, Aaron the first high priest was to wear a signet marked with the words 'Holy to the LORD' on his forehead.
- The signet also appears in the breastplate that the priest wore. It was to have 12 precious stones on it, and each stone was to be marked with the names of 1 of the 12 tribes of Israel. So in Israel's first worship, we have the identification of God's people marked on the breastplate AND the identification of Israel's God marked on the high priest's forehead.

- The 2nd biblical idea of sealing and marking involves the marking of God's people throughout Israel's history. During the last and worst of the 10 plagues – the death of the firstborn son – Israel's homes were marked by the blood of the Passover lamb smeared over their doorframes. This mark told the angel of death to pass over their homes. As we saw two weeks ago, the plagues of the trumpet and bowl judgments during the Tribulation are patterned after the plagues that fell on Egypt. So we see a pattern emerging. Just as the Exodus plagues form the figural pattern on which the Tribulation plagues are patterned, so the mark that spared God's people during the Exodus plagues might very well be a pattern for a mark that will spare God's people during the Tribulation plagues.
- We see the Exodus marks function as a re-purposed pattern during the Exile experience of Israel. Check out Ezekiel 9:3-6. First, the people are divided into righteous and unrighteous. Who are the righteous? The ones who recognize sin and are grieved by it. Secondly, the angel puts a mark on the righteous. Third, the destroying angels are commissioned to slaughter the unrighteous and defile the city. But notice the restriction: Don't touch anyone who is marked! Again, the mark preserves the faithful by preventing judgment from falling on them.

That's the pattern: Judgment is inevitable. But judgment will only affect the ones who are not marked by God for protection.

That leads us to our 3rd biblical background theme about sealing and marking.

- All Christians are sealed by God at the moment of conversion. It's the same Greek word (σφραγας) that was used to translate the 'signets'/'seals' that the priests were to make in Exodus.
- Two passages: 2 Corinthians 1:22. God has put his seal on all believers. Ephesians 1:13. The seal is defined as the Holy Spirit. The seal functions to guarantee our inheritance. Nothing can prevent us from receiving what God has promised to us, because God has put his mark on us.

So now we can move forward to our next question.

2. Who is sealed and marked in Revelation?

The key passage is Revelation 7. Notice how the passage completes chapter six (the introduction of four horsemen riding out in judgment) and is the correlation of the

Exodus and Exile pattern – judgment is held back until sealing could happen. The sealing of Revelation 7 must happen before the judgments of Revelation 6 can start happening. And the sealing prevents judgment from falling on the ones sealed. They are preserved through the judgment, just like the previous biblical pattern.

The historical background is interesting. Slaves were branded with their master's name on their forehead. Notice how Revelation 7:3 identifies the ones who were to be sealed: 'servants of our God.' Notice where they were to be sealed: on the forehead, the place where ownership is marked off. The place where Aaron was marked as belonging to God. This is how Revelation 3:10 can be fulfilled. The sealed ones will be kept from the hour of trial coming on the whole world, just like the Israelites who painted their doorposts were kept from experiencing the death of firstborn sons.

Just as Aaron was marked with God's name in Exodus, God's people are marked with God's name (ownership) and the name of God's city, New Jerusalem (the inheritance guaranteed for God's people). Revelation 3:12.

So who are the ones getting marked? We see in Revelation 7:4 a list of 144,000 people. Piecing together info from all of Revelation, these are 144,000 Israelite male virgins.

So are these actual Israelite young men? Or is this symbolic language? It's symbolic.

Seven proofs

1. The tribe list doesn't make sense. The tribes Ephraim and Dan aren't included, despite typically being included in OT lists talking about the end times restoration of Israel's tribes. Why not? Probably because these 2 tribes were the most guilty of idolatry, and John has called out idolatry in his letters to the churches.
2. Plus we have both Joseph and Manasseh listed. Manasseh was Joseph's son, so anyone in Manasseh was also in Joseph. There's no distinction. It's just a way of getting 12 symbolically pure names from Israel's history. Plus Judah is listed first here. That's highly unusual. Except Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Judah now first to highlight the prominence of Jesus, the Messiah from Judah!
3. 10 of the tribes were lost in 722 BC during the Assyrian invasion. The other 2 tribes were lost after Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. There aren't 12,000 pure-blooded people left from each tribe after 2,000 years of intermarrying and diluting the blood line. 3 possible responses: (1) God knows who has that blood.

But like what % is that blood? How many of you have mocked Elizabeth 'Pocahontas' Warren for being like 1/128th or 1/256th Cherokee Indian? Does that count as being Cherokee? That's just 7 or 8 generations removed from having an Indian relative. And yet you think it's cool to go back, what, 50 to 100 generations to find Hebrew tribal DNA? That argument is beyond weak. (2) The 2nd response is that God has hidden a group of pure-blooded members of each tribe. We have Jewish writings where the rabbis predicted this would happen. But is that what you're going with? That somewhere on earth there's been a group of hundreds of thousands of people living undiscovered who have never interacted with outside society or intermarried? That seems far-fetched. (3) The most feasible argument is that God will miraculously restore the bloodline. But that's basically just arguing for a new creation, not a preservation. So logically, your literalism has a huge problem. I'd argue it's an insurmountable problem.

4. Where could 144,000 come from? It's oddly specific. How about 12 tribes times 12 apostles times 10 (the number of fullness). It's just like Revelation 21, where the 12 gates had the names of the 12 tribes inscribed and the 12 foundations of the wall had the names of the 12 apostles written. God's true people are those from the OT times represented by the 12 tribes and those from the NT times represented by the 12 apostles. So 144,000 is a symbolic way of saying 'all God's people throughout history, who belong to God by faith.'
5. What about the male virgin thing? Every census list in the Bible was recorded in a military context, to count possible soldiers. Young and male and virgin represents being of age for military service. So this list is God's people prepared to fight for God's Kingdom. It's an ironic battle, because we don't fight the way the world fights. We might by clinging to Jesus by faith and sharing his gospel.
6. What about the Jewish thing? In Revelation, being a true Jew is about faith, not lineage. Look at Revelation 2:9 (same as 3:9). Who worships in synagogues? Ethnic Jews. Yet though they claim to be Jews, they are not. So who are the Jews? Revelation 1:6 is a key. The kingdom (big word for Israel who wanted King David's reign restored) and priests (big word for Israel's worship) are those freed from sins by the blood of Jesus. God's true people aren't Jews. His true people are those that have faith in Jesus Christ.
7. Notice how God's people are defined in the eternal state in New Jerusalem. Revelation 22:4. We have God's name written on our foreheads. Not just a few Jews. All of us. So the 144,000 is the full number of God's people of faith. And all those people are sealed. The OT saints were under the high priest's seal. The NT saints are sealed by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

So that leads us to...

3. What is the mark of the beast?

Well, now that we know the huge part sealing plays in Scripture, we have a background against which to understand the mark of the beast. It's the counter-seal of the believers. It's a parody of what the Holy Spirit does in sealing the saints. Instead of God's name like Aaron, it's a blasphemous name. See Revelation 17:5.

Is it a literal seal? Will people someday walk around with a mark on their foreheads or a microchip in their wrists? NO! Can you show me your seal on your body right now? Of course not, but yet the Holy Spirit has sealed you. Sealing isn't a physical mark. It's a sign of ownership. It denotes loyal, consistent, wholehearted commitment. Believers are committed to Jesus. Unbelievers are committed to the ungodly world system and its false worship – as represented by the beast. Hence, they are 'marked' as belonging to the beast. And, as we know, the true power behind the beast is Satan.

'Mark' in Revelation 13 is Greek *χαπαγμα* - the word used for the Roman Emperor's seal on business contracts and for the impress of the Roman ruler's head on coins.

Historical Context: In the Roman Empire, those who participated in the required rituals of imperial emperor worship were given certificates to mark them as loyal to empire worship. That was the first 'mark of the beast.' To not have the certificate could cause you relational, financial and vocational damage. So, anytime the power of the state is used to compel false worship, the 'mark of the beast' is the standard used to determine whether you are committed to the false worship required by society. So the mark of the beast isn't a chip implant. But the 'support the LGBT rights movement' and if you speak a word against our new cultural orthodoxy like Atlanta's fire chief did in a sermon he preached at his own church, we will fire you from your job ... that's what we're getting at.

So, to be clear. What is the mark of the beast? It's the mark on peoples' lives who have pledged their ultimate loyalty to false gods of this world instead of to Jesus.

Now, last question...

4. What can we learn from studying the Mark of the Beast?

Three things.

1. You can't accidentally take the Mark of the Beast by getting a microchip implanted in you. Don't freak out about what might or might not be the mark of the beast. If you are loyal to Jesus, you are already sealed by the Holy Spirit. Judgment falls on those who reject God and choose to worship the beast – the world system and the pleasure and financial gain and the greed and immorality the beast offers. So if you have given your life to Jesus, you can't lose your salvation by accidentally accepting some such mark.
2. You belong to someone. You are marked by someone. Either Jesus or Satan. There is no neutral ground. If you have listened to this whole presentation and have never truly put your trust in Jesus, do that now. Faith in Jesus is what will mark you off to be spared from God's judgment and to inherit eternal life.
3. Our job as Christians is not to oppose whatever technology advances or moves toward 1-world government that we think might enable advanced tracking of citizens and easy ways to financially destroy non-compliant people. Our job is to live lives marked by Jesus Christ so that others will be drawn to him. A great application verse is 1 Peter 2:12. So less time spent sharing mark of the beast theories on Facebook. More time loving your friends and neighbors and sharing the gospel of Jesus with them.