

Mark of the Beast: 666

The importance of the expression "Mark of the Beast" is to be seen in its several uses in Revelation (13:16-18; 14:11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). This mark can be taken to be a brand, stamp, tag or the phylacteries, (Deut. 6:8), having economic (Rev. 13:17) and religious significance (Rev. 14:11).

Rev. 13:18 suggests that the mark of the beast is to be identified with the number of the beast, 666. John could be using an ancient system of numerology called gematria, in which the number concepts (e.g., 600, 60, 6, etc.) are identified with their alphabetic letter equivalents, to be translated then into proper names.

Thus, 666 have been identified with Titus, or Nero, or Napoleon, or Mussolini, or even to a computer. In fact, there have been dozens of significant persons throughout history who have been identified as "the beast." Needless to say, all these guesses have been wrong. The anti-Christ is not a computer as claimed by some Charismatic because a computer has no soul and therefore, it cannot suffer in hell.

The number 666 could well be identified with some future historical antichrist or situation, but history teaches us to be cautious in trying to be too precise. Although the term "antichrist" occurs only in the Epistles, the conception of an arch-enemy of the Messiah is found in the Scriptures.

The Antichrist opposes Christ. Because Christ is not fully revealed in the Old Testament offers an incomplete portrait of Antichrist but furnishes materials for the picture in description of personal or national opposition to God.

The Bible described the anti-Christ but did not identify the Beast and the anti-Christ, so we are not in position to accuse somebody as the antichrist. Certain individuals, infamous for wickedness, are called "sons or men of Belial" (beliya'al, probably "without worth," "useless").

Idolatry (Deut. 13:13), sodomy and rape (Judg. 19:22; 20:13), drunkenness (1 Sam. 1:16), disregard of God (1 Sam. 2:12), sacrilege (1 Sam. 2:17, 22), disrespect for authority (1 Sam. 10:27; 2 Chr. 13:7), lack of hospitality (1

Sam. 25:17, 25), perjury (1 Kings 21:10, 13), and evil speech (Prov. 6:12; 16:27) are among the sins of these men.

Opposition of God's kingdom is opposition to Him. The nations' vain plot against the Lord's anointed king in Psalm 2 may be a foreshadowing idea of the antichrist. This rebellion is symbolized in Daniel's little horn. Chapter 7, the more eschatological, seems to depict the defeat of God's final enemy, while chapter 8 describes Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.), the foreign ruler most hated by the Jews because of his personal wickedness and ruthless persecution of their religion. The writers of the Scriptures used their own rulers as reference and epitome of evil.

The portrait of this "king of the north" (Dan. 11), the personification of evil, has helped significantly to shape the New Testament figure of Antichrist:

- He abolished the continual burnt offering and erected the abomination of desolation in the temple (Dan. 11:31; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Rev. 13:14-15);
- He exalted himself to the position of deity (Dan. 11:36-39; 2 Thess. 2:3-4);
- His helpless death points to Christ's slaying of "the lawless one" (Dan. 11:45; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:20).
- The beast from the sea in Revelation 13:1 recalls Daniel 7:3:7 and strengthens the link between Daniel's prophecy and the New Testament account of the Antichrist.

The "lawless one" (2 Thess. 2:8,9) has been connected with Beliar, which in rabbinic tradition is interpreted as "without yoke" (beli'ol), "refusing the law's yoke". This connection seems strengthened by the translation of belial by paranomos, "lawbreaker" (Deut. 13:13). However, though Paul's description may partially reflect the Beliar tradition, he distinguishes Beliar from the lawless one: Beliar is a synonym of Satan (2 Cor. 6:15), while Satan and the lawless one are differentiated.

The references to Christ's opponent are neither numerous nor specific. The disciples were warned that false Christ will attempt to deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). Similarly, Christ speaks of one who comes in His own name, whom the Jews receive (John 5:43). This may

be a veiled reference to the Antichrist or to any false Messiah who present himself to Judaism.

Even the mention of the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14), recalling vividly Daniel's prophecy, is made with remarkable restraint. A single evil personality may be in view, but his portrait is not even sketched.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul gives a clearer picture of Christ's archenemy, whose outstanding characteristic is contempt of law. Two names, described the antichrist as "man of lawlessness" and "the lawless one" (2:3, 8-9), stress this anarchistic attitude, recalling Daniel 7:25 says the antichrist who is also called the little horn will change the laws and introduce a different system that will be greatly accepted by people of tribulation.

The Antichrist makes exclusive claim to deity (2:4) in terms reminiscent of Daniel 7:25; 11:36. Paul presented a pseudo-God viciously opposing all religions. His model may have been the blasphemous emperor Gaius (A.D. 37-41). The anti-Christ will deceive many by wonders (2 Thess. 2:9-10). Christ worked miracles by God's power, and the Jews attributed them to Satan (Matt. 12:24); Antichrist will work miracles by satanic power, and so therefore many will worship him as God.

One of the Antichrist's names, "son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3; John 17:12), reveals his destiny: Christ will slay him by his breath and the brightness of his appearing (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:15, 20; Isaiah 11:4).

The Antichrist is the personal culmination of a principle of rebellion already working secretly, "the mystery of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:7). When God's restraining hand which preserves law and order is withdrawn, this spirit of satanic lawlessness will become incarnate in "the lawless one" (see Tract 68).

Though John recognized the expectation of a single antichrist, he turns his attention to the many antichrist who have come denying that Jesus is the Christ and thus denying the true nature of both Father and Son (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3).

Cultic religions discredited Christ's humanity (2 John 7), claiming that he seemed to have human form. To John they were the embodiment of the antichrist spirit. John's account complements rather than contradicts Paul's.

Following Daniel, Paul depicts a single archenemy, who claims the right to personal worship. John stresses the spiritual elements in these claims and the spiritual lie which made the Antichrist seemingly strong. The anti-Christ is an Israelite by blood with burning passion for power.

The Apocalyptic beast (Rev. 13), is dependent in spirit and detail on Daniel, combines the characteristics of all four Old Testament beasts. Further, the New Testament beast has an authority belonging only to the little horn of Daniel's beast.

John seemingly implies that the savage impiety of Antiochus will be embodied in a kingdom; for the beast, although he has some personal characteristics, is more than a person: his seven heads are seven kings (Rev. 17:10-12). The beast himself is an eighth king, springing from one of the seven.

This complicated picture suggests that the beast symbolizes worldly power, the anti-God spirit of a nationalistic ambition (in Daniel's prophecy personified in Antiochus and in John's day in Roman's Emperors) which will become incarnate in one great demagogue, Antichrist. To Paul's account John adds at least one important element, the false prophet, a second beast who works under the authority of Antichrist, as the Antichrist gains his authority from the dragon, Satan (Rev. 13:2, 11-12). After directing Antichrist's political and religious enterprises, the false prophet shares his fate at Christ's advent (Rev. 19:20).

The Reformers equated Antichrist with the papacy, as had some medieval theologians, Gregory I, who taught that whoever assumed the title "universal priest" was the Antichrist. They believe that Antichrist will usher in a period of great tribulation at history's close, in connection with a mighty empire like a revived Rome, and will dominate politics, religion, and commerce until Christ's advent. Roman Catholic scholars retaliated, branding Rome's opponents Antichrist. As of this time, it is irrational to speculate who will be this anti-Christ because he will remain unrevealed until the rapture of the Church.

The Christian life is a battleground and not a playground that he is up against an enemy that is much more powerful and smarter than he is.

The believer can glorify God in this angelic conflict by becoming an invisible hero with an invisible impact on human and angelic history. The believer is being conformed to the image of Christ by conforming his thoughts, words and actions to Christ by means of the Spirit will have an invisible impact. Invisible Heroes are described as the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). They are the "lights of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Invisible Heroes are like a "city on a hill" (Matt. 5:14).

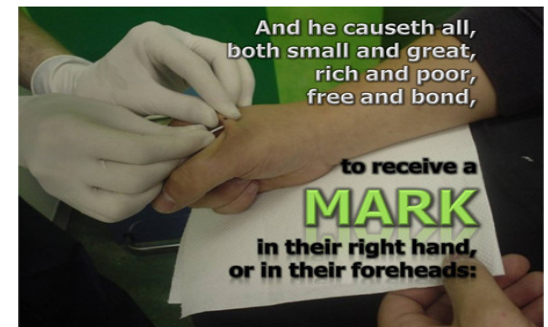
The Lord has given the believer spiritual armor (Eph. 6:11, 14-17), and spiritual weapons to fight this spiritual warfare (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The same power that the humanity of Christ used to achieve the strategic victory in the angelic conflict has now been made available to the believer in the church age: (1) Word (2) Spirit. The battleground for this spiritual warfare is in the believer's soul (Rom. 7:23; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Gal. 5:17). God has provided the believer the power to overcome his spiritual adversary, Satan and the kingdom of darkness (1 John 4:4).

There is no excuse for any believer to become a casualty or loser in this war. This is why we receive the following prohibitions and commands in the Scripture to use divine provisions and weapons (Phil. 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:6, Mat. 6:31, 6:32).

We are to appropriate for ourselves by faith in the Word of God, the victory that is ours through our identification and union with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection and session. We fight "from" victory and not "for" victory (1 Thess. 5:8). Our faith in the Word of God enables us to stand our ground against the attacks of the enemy (1 Cor. 16:1).

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