

Study Guide #10: The Mark of the Beast

Introduction

More has probably been written about the mark of the beast than any other topic from the book of Revelation. This Study Guide explores this topic. However, it would be very beneficial if you studied at least either Explorer III, Study Guides #7 or #8 before studying this one. Either one of those Study Guides explains who the 1st beast in Revelation 13 represents. It's impossible to determine the mark if you don't know who the beast is, since it's *his* mark.

Question #1: Where and when will the mark of the beast crisis occur?

Answer: Revelation 13 is the principal chapter in the Bible outlining the mark of the beast. According to that chapter, it will involve **“All who dwell on the earth...”** (v. 8, NKJV), that is, **“the earth and those who dwell in it...”** (v. 12, NKJV). In discussing the 7 Last Plagues, Revelation 16:2 declares that the 1st plague, sores, will be poured out on **“the men who had the mark of the beast...”** (NKJV). Since the 7 Last Plagues are clearly sequential and must come in relatively rapid succession (because at least some with the sores will still be alive to experience the plague of darkness under the 5th plague, vv. 10-11), the 7 Last Plagues will strike the same generation of the wicked. Revelation 14:9-11 plainly speaks about the final destruction of the wicked. Moreover, a comparison of the 7th plague language about the mountains and islands disappearing (Revelation 16:20) with the language in the 6th Seal stating that **“the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place”** (Revelation 6:14, NKJV) at **“the great day of His [the Lamb's, Jesus'] wrath”** (6:17, NKJV), we know that the 7th plague must be immediately followed by the 2nd Coming of Jesus. Therefore, the mark of the beast crisis will be a global crisis that immediately precedes the 7 Last Plagues and the 2nd Coming of Jesus.

Question #2: What is the key issue involved in the mark of the beast?

Answer: A variation of the word “worship” occurs 5 times in Revelation 13—twice in verse 4 and once each in verses 8, 12, and 15. It also occurs 2 additional times in Revelation 14:9-11 in connection with the beast. We further note that Revelation 13 alludes to 2 different Old Testament showdowns between true and false worship. *First*, Revelation 13:13 echoes the story in Elijah's time when fire fell from heaven and consumed his sacrifice on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:20-40). *Second*, Revelation 13:14-15 recalls the story of the image set up by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, when the 3 Jewish friends of Daniel were miraculously preserved in the fiery furnace when they refused to bow down and worship the king's image. These facts make it clear that the mark of the beast involves a global showdown over the issue of *worship*.



Elijah on Mt. Carmel

Question #3: What else will this final crisis involve?

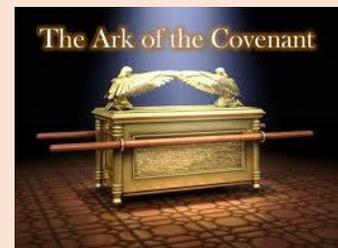
Answer: Like 2 bookends, reference is made in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 to **“the commandments of God”** (NKJV) being kept by His people immediately before and after the actual discussion concerning the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:1-14:11). This fact is more significant because these are the only 2 *certain* references to **“the commandments of God”** in the entire book. [NOTE: A few Bible versions have the reading **“that do His commandments”** in Revelation 22:14. But textual evidence favors the reading **“wash their robes”** instead. In Greek, the words are very similar, which almost certainly explains how a scribal error could be made.]

Question #4: Does the way that Revelation is organized help us decipher what the reference to **“the commandments of God”** *specifically* means?

Answer: Yes. Except for the Prologue (Revelation 1:1-8) and the Epilogue (Revelation 22:6-21), every other major section in the book is introduced by a heavenly sanctuary/throne scene or allusion to that. See Explorer III, Study Guide #15 for more explanation and details on this fact. The sanctuary scene that introduces the section containing the direct discussion of the mark of the beast crisis is in 11:19:

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail (NKJV).

The *next* heavenly sanctuary/throne scene is located in 15:5-8. That makes Revelation 11:19-15:4 one major section in the book. Significantly, the very focal point of this section’s heavenly sanctuary/throne scene is on the Ark of the Covenant. The most important items stored inside that Ark were the 2 tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments had been written by God’s own hand (Deuteronomy 10:1-5; I Kings 8:9; II Chronicles 5:10). Given this introduction to the section containing the prophecy of the mark of the beast, certainly the reference to **“the commandments of God”** specifically directs us to the Ten Commandments.



Question #5: Which one of the Ten Commandments will be the point of controversy in the final crisis?

Answer: All Christians agree that true worship is directed to God. Given that obvious fact, we would note that the 1st 4 Commandments directly concern our relationship with God, while the last 6 concern our relationship to our fellow man. A quick outline of the 1st 4 Commandments follows:

- First Commandment: Have no other gods except the God—Exodus 20:3.
- Second Commandment: Don’t make any images as symbols to worship—Exodus 20:4-6.
- Third Commandment: Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain—Exodus 20:7.
- Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy—Exodus 20:8-11.

It's difficult to see how the final worship showdown could be a test of loyalty regarding the First Commandment, because having no other gods except God could probably only be tested in a literal way via an image or idol, which the Second Commandment plainly forbids. Revelation 13 alludes to 2 different worship showdowns in ancient Israel. Since both are alluded to, the final worship showdown can't specifically be like either one of them—which eliminates a test with a literal image. They are mentioned only as examples of previous worship showdowns. It's also difficult to imagine how taking the Lord's name in vain could be tested in a showdown over worship, even seeing it in its broader sense of claiming to belong to God, but living contrary to His will. It's not difficult to imagine the Sabbath Commandment being such a test over worship because the original test in the Garden of Eden involved a tree (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Genesis 2:16-17) which looked just as good as all the other trees (Genesis 2:9-10). God's instructions not to eat of the fruit of that particular tree was a great test of loyalty because the only reason not to eat of its fruit was because God said not to do so. Likewise, the Sabbath looks like any other day....

Question #6: Isn't Revelation 14:7 an allusion to the weekly Sabbath?

Answer: Yes. It states that mankind is to **“worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water”** (NKJV). That's clearly a paraphrase or an echo from the Fourth Commandment, as follows: **“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them”** (Exodus 20:11, NKJV). In fact, this is the *only* one of the Ten Commandments referred to in this section of Revelation. In the section that (a) majors in the mark of the beast crisis, (b) contains the only certain reference to **“the commandments of God,”** in the context of the Ark of the Covenant, which famously contained the Ten Commandments, this is hardly a coincidence. This evidence seems to narrow the issue to the Fourth Commandment.

Question #7: To who or what does the number 666 refer?

Answer: The number 666 associated with the sea monster (Antichrist) in Revelation 13:18 is usually taken to mean the total number reached when using the letters of his name or title representing certain numbers.



the number 666.

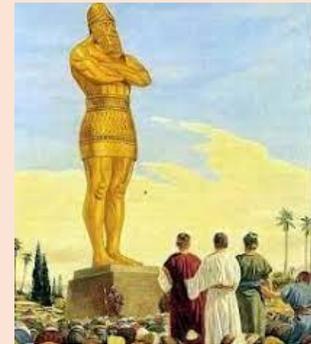
But on that basis, an almost infinite number of conclusions can be reached—a fact which hardly fits the precision of Bible prophecy. People sometimes reply that *other* specifications in the prophecy identify the Antichrist, and the number only *confirms* the identity. The problem is, however, that major leaders have numerous titles, and it just seems too contrived to simply pick the one that fits

There's another way to understand the number. Revelation 13:17 identifies the mark of the beast as **“the number of his name”** (NKJV). In contrast, those who refuse the mark of the beast have the name of God the Father on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1). Note that the reference to the Father's name immediately follows the statements about the number of the beast's name on the foreheads of the wicked, whose number is 666 (13:17-18). This relationship between these 2 different names suggests a deliberate contrast pointing to God's name and the beast's name. In Scripture, the significance of names is that they represent character. For example, when Moses asked to see God's glory, the Lord replied that He would **“proclaim the name**

of the Lord before you” (Exodus 33:18-19, NKJV). He then identified His name with His character as being **“gracious”** and having **“compassion”** (v. 19, NKJV).

Question #8: So how does 666 refer to the Antichrist?

Answer: When Revelation 13:18 calls the beast’s name **“the number of a man,”** the Greek could just as easily be translated as “the number of mankind” or “the number of man.” Man’s number is 6 because he was created on the 6th day of Creation week (Genesis 1:24-31). All acknowledge that God’s number is 7, which signifies perfection. In this context, the number 666 would represent as a failure the claim of the beast to represent God on earth. As he repeats this claim by his actions, his human number keeps repeating the number 6 and never moves to 7. Some have objected to this logic on the grounds that the text reads **“six hundred and sixty-six”** and *not* “six, six, six.” However, the link in this prophecy to the story of the image worship in Daniel 3 (Revelation 13:14-15) allows us to see that the number 6 plays *the* crucial role in that story also. Daniel 3:1 tells us that the image was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. These numbers are both factors of 6; the important factor seems to be the number 6. The beast’s number 666 is also a factor of 6. Moreover, when the number 666 is written in numeric form, it appears as 3 consecutive sixes. Therefore, we stand by the significance of the number 6 as the key to understanding this prophecy in Revelation 13.



Question #9: What, in the context of the numbers 6 and 7 (see Question #8), reminds us creatures that we can never be equal to the Creator and thus deserving of worship?

Answer: In Scripture, the weekly Sabbath—the 7th day—reminds us that God is the Creator (the perfect 7), and we are His creatures (Exodus 20:8-11), with the human number 6 (Genesis 1:26-31). As a result, the creature can never reach the perfection or authority of the Creator. Therefore, we conclude that the Sabbath Commandment is what the final global showdown over worship will be to test those who claim to belong to God.

Question #10: What is the actual mark of the beast? Is it a literal mark?

Answer: According to Revelation 14:9-11, anyone who receives the mark of the beast **“shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God”** (v. 10, NKJV). In other words, those failing the test of loyalty in the *final* crisis will be eternally lost. God, as pictured in the Bible, would not condemn anyone simply for being unable to physically prevent the authorities from placing some kind of physical mark or implantation under the skin. Therefore, the mark cannot be a literal, physical mark or device. Various mechanical or computer technologies will probably be used to *enforce* the mark of the beast. But none of those things will be the mark *itself*. This means the mark of the beast is an invisible mark that God sees—in the heart of a person—that is the result of a person’s own willful decision to yield to the global pressure to choose the wrong side in the great controversy between Jesus and Satan.

Since the weekly 7th-day Sabbath will be the final test of loyalty to God, the mark of the beast must result from honoring a counterfeit Sabbath. In light of the fact that the Antichrist is a counterfeit Christian Church-State, the counterfeit Sabbath must be Sunday. Therefore, those who honor Sunday and refuse to honor the Bible Sabbath will receive the invisible spiritual mark that will be the sign of a person's decision for his eternal destiny.

Question #11: What is the difference between receiving the mark on the right hand or on the forehead?

Answer: The forehead represents the center of thinking in a person. Literally, the brain behind the forehead, called the frontal lobe, is the place where a person's will and decision-making power lies. Most people are right-handed, and general knowledge tells us that the hand represents the action of a person because it's the hand that often actually does things. Therefore, it's apparent that one who receives the mark of the beast on his forehead is a person who will truly think he's doing the right thing. On the other hand, one who receives the mark of the beast on his hand is a person who will go along to get along. His heart may not be in it, but he mistakenly thinks it's the safer course of action.

Question #12: How does Sunday worship constitute worship of the Antichrist?

Answer: "Worship" is a broad word that has several nuances of meaning. Several words related to it tell us that *true* worship is the extravagant respect and awe directed at God for being in His spiritual presence. In the final crisis of loyalty, false worship is the exercise of great respect and either awe or fear directed at the Antichrist and a yielding to its authority in defiance of God's Law. Any idea that worship always involves bowing down and/or praying to someone is simply wrong. Paying homage to the Antichrist will simply be to yield to its demands to honor the counterfeit Sabbath. That's the sense in which the Antichrist will be worshipped.



Pope Francis

Question #13: Does anyone have the mark of the beast right now?

Answer: No. Revelation 13:11-18 is clear that the mark is received during the final crisis when people on earth will be forced to make a decision for or against God. Of course, it's always dangerous to ignore God's eternal Moral Law because it's a reflection of His holy character. But the mark of the beast will only exist when the global worship showdown compels people to make an irrevocable spiritual choice. Therefore, as of the writing of this Study Guide, no one anywhere in the world has the mark of the beast.