

What Is the Mark of the Beast?

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MAIN VERSES

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Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love. A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home. Shabbat Shalom everyone. So we're so excited to be here today. If you're visiting our church today for the first time or watching services online for the first time, guys, we are a community of diverse families and individuals who love the Sabbath. We find joy in the entirety of the Bible, but most of all, we are a community that seeks first and foremost to orbit the person of Jesus whom we call Yeshua. So welcome to Founded in Truth Fellowship.

Must be honest today—sometimes when preachers or pastors craft a sermon based on the scriptures and based on the conviction that these scriptures hold, it can be nerve-wracking. It's because you know that there will be those who will become very upset. And if you don't deliver the message of the Lord in such a way that they will miss out on the edification or the edifying message because they're too busy being defensive. And I find myself in that place today.

What Is the Mark of the Beast?

So what is the mark of the beast? Well, we're going to dive into John's apocalyptic vision once again today in [Revelation 13](#) and see what he indicates in his vision, which he wrote down and sent in the form of a letter to seven literal churches in Asia Minor in the first century. And if you did your homework weeks ago, you are familiar with this section of Revelation where the battle actually begins. The war between the saints and the beast and the follower of the beast begins to form. So it started last time we met with [Revelation 12](#). Remember, we went through John's apocalyptic nativity, and we get this imagery of this child being born. And something

about this child being born of the woman causes the defeat of the dragon, who is the serpent of heaven. And he is thrown down from heaven as the child is lifted up in this seat of authority. And the dragon gets thrown to earth and he throws the towel in and he says, all right, that's fine. I'll just go away. No, he's mad. That's the narrative that John paints, the film he's directing. This dragon is ticked that he has been defeated and lost already. So he decides to go after the woman and make war with her children, the saints, believers. Yeah, so John paints this poetic picture of this war breaking out. And how does the dragon—who is the serpent, who is the devil, Satan, Hasatan—make war with the children? And we're about to get a glimpse of that in apocalyptic fashion in chapter 13. And we're going to see how the dragon chooses to do this. And it is through his agents that he tries to attack believers, the children of the woman. We have beasts that come up. One beast comes up out of the sea that he commands and serves him. And then we have another beast that comes up out of the land. And we can go ahead and jump in and talk about the mark of the beast. I know, that's what everybody goes to. All right, let's go to the end of [Revelation 13](#) and talk about what the mark of the beast is. But guys, I feel like it's extremely important to first talk about the context of the entire chapter. Because this is what identifies the depth of what the mark is. We have multiple beasts—not just one. So whose mark is it? And why is that applicable? And so we're going to explore that today. So how many of you guys have ever been anxious about the mark of the beast? Just one person. All right, two people. Man, you guys, three. You guys are great. Look at your faith. This is great. Right? Ever been?

A Child of the 90s

I remember being a child. In the time long ago called the 90s. And that was a time when we had no cell phones. And televisions looked similar to the big blocks in Minecraft, right? And some of you don't know. Y'all don't even know. There was a time when you could ride your bikes with your friends all around the neighborhood and your parents would allow it. And you could even go outside of your neighborhood. Your parents really wouldn't care that much. No big deal. Hmm. But if you were in more evangelical circles during this time, it may have been a little traumatizing, just a little bit. This time as a child, for me, looking back, really shaped the way I view God and my theology through my teen years and even into adulthood.

The Satanic Panic

This was the time where satanic panic was a big deal. You guys remember that from the 80s and early 90s? There was 12,000 unsubstantiated cases opened of satanic child abuse across the

nation because of a conspiracy of a widespread satanic child abuse circle or ring involving underground tunnels and daycares and everybody was involved in it. And it produced this hysteria where accusations were thrown, people were arrested, thrown in jail, even without a trial. And preschools were dug up just to make sure tunnels weren't underneath them. It was a big deal. This was also a time when there was a lot of accusation of everything in secular media being satanic. Like that's what we jumped to, automatically, satanic. Pokemon, for example, was teaching our children to become warlocks because you throw the ball and a monster pops out and it's because of divination. Forget Lord of the Rings, Gandalf. He's kosher, right? Chronicles of Narnia, where the good guys are casting spells and kosher. But Pokemon, no. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, pagan because they're turtles that talk. Smurfs, pagan. Sorry, satanic. That was our go-to during this time. At least this is my experience. Maybe you had a different experience. A time when awful school shootings took place and resulted in many deaths. And our primary focus for blame was music by Marilyn Manson and a 16-bit video game called Doom, not the widespread issue of extreme bullying in schools and an ignorant view of mental health issues. Those were pushed back. During this time, an immense fear of the government became pretty standard as well throughout evangelical circles because it's the agenda that's pushing this satanic agenda. Again, everything.

This was also the time that was ripe, ripe for a fantastic book series—I mean, genius, perfectly timed—that rode on the waves of all of this movement called the Left Behind series. What a potent audience that had already been primed. And oh my goodness, anyone remember the Left Behind series? I thought everyone experienced that, but I talked to one generation below me, and they're like, I don't know about Left Behind. You don't know about the Left Behind series? How many of you were scared reading it? Anyone ever get a little scared, nervous? Okay, so teenagers, we were like, yeah, the books are that thick. I ain't doing that. Okay, we have a teen version. That's specifically what happens when teenagers go through the tribulation and get heads chopped off and stuff if they're not believers and they're not really saved. Anyone read those? A small...

Left Behind and the Tribulation

Guys, the Left Behind series, my opinion, that was the nail in the coffin for standardizing this type of evangelical eschatology. This consisted of an atmosphere where the world was always ending soon. The tribulation was happening at any moment. But it's okay because if you're truly saved, then you'll be raptured out, right? If you're truly saved. But if you're not saved, you will go through tribulation and you'll get your head cut off. That's what my church kind of

insinuated in my youth group. This is what was taught to me as an 11-year-old. And like we can all kind of laugh about some of this stuff now. I believe kids were traumatized by this and their view of God. And this was the lens of their God and their Bible and their mission that Yeshua had handed down to them. This is what cloaked that. And it wasn't parents that did this. It was a movement. Like we systematically did this. And it caused me to doubt my faith every single week as a little child. And so every single week, I'd go up for the altar call, right? Like we all did. Maybe just me. No one else went up multiple times to the altar call to get saved, right? Yeah. Wanted to claim that salvation in children's church. Not on the basis of who my king is or because that's the king I wanted to serve. No. Not on the basis of me wanting to pledge allegiance to my God or be in a relationship. No. Not to be a follower and practice what Jesus taught. No. Not to want to experience where true hope is found, where the true strength is found, where salvation is found, where eternal life is found. No, we'd run up every single week to get saved because we didn't want to go through this tribulation that we were going to be tortured through. Always in fear, always worrying, always suspecting the government is going to begin rounding us up in camps and waiting for the Antichrist to appear.

Guessing at the Mark

And along with this came an anticipation of the mark of the beast. And so during the 90s, I remember when it was first asserted, someone had an idea to program a little basic RFID module and they'd slide it up under their skin so they could open doors or something. That was it. That was it. It is here or barcodes at the grocery store. They're going to tattoo those on our hands and our foreheads, right? That's how they're going to mark us. When debit and credit cards first came out, they were considered to be the mark of the beast in evangelical circles because you can buy and sell, right?

Social security numbers, probably one of the older ones, past century. That was a big deal. They're going to track us now and this is going to lead to XYZ. And this is an important section of history to acknowledge. It is. Because many of us draw our context of John's letter called Revelation from these experiences and not what his letter actually says. That's why I make this effort to point out this history.

The early church fathers never seemed to think the mark of the beast was something that was a literal object. Earliest generations of Christianity, no. They didn't think it was a microchip. They didn't think it was a tattoo. They were more focused on the number of the beast, 666. They were more focused on that. Why? Well, because in chapter 13, verse 17, it says the mark of the

beast. It tells you what it is. Spoiler alert. It says it's the name of the beast, which is 666. So they were like, okay, 666. Let's identify this number of humanity or number of man 666.

The fear of the mark of the beast being something like a microchip or a tattoo or vaccine or social security numbers really didn't exist outside of the last 150 years, at least not on the level it is today. The earliest commentaries from Christian believers, closest to the time of John, understood that regarding the mark, they debated on exactly what the number meant, but they all came to the same conclusion. The mark is a spiritual state where you are set apart from Christ because you're following the beast and not the kingdom of God. How's that for underwhelming?

When Did This Transition Take Place?

And so when did this transition take place? From viewing the mark of the beast as a spiritual mark of serving the beast into like a physical mark. I just need to stress something. One is far more worrisome than the other. When did this transition take place? Well, it came, it kind of rose up around the same time that the rapture idea was introduced. Pre-tribulation, pre-tribulationism and rapture.

Now, before I go any further, I want to tell you guys what I believe. And the reason why I want to state this is so some won't assume that I believe something I do not. And I found this to be very important. I believe Yeshua is currently reigning as king. I believe he is the son of God. I believe he's the lamb that conquered the beast through his sacrifice. And I believe the Bible when it says he has all power and authority in both heaven and earth now. I believe that. And I believe he is returning. And I believe his return could be any second. Anybody heard that? Fantastic.

In 1830, there was a man by the name of John Nelson Darby. And I'm going to do a sloppy summary and review of what he believed. But he argued, from his perspective, that God would keep his church, the saints, from enduring this final, awful suffering forever—what we would call today the tribulation. He believed that the saints would be pulled out of that. They wouldn't experience that. He truly believed that despite all the martyrs who had died before—skinned alive, honey put on them, eaten by bugs—there was going to be something worse in the last generation, and the church was going to be removed, and they would not suffer that. He was kind of the father of dispensationalism. Basically, he believed that the Israel in the Bible... was completely separate than the church, and the two do not touch, okay? Totally separate. And he basically argued that the great tribulation, this time of suffering, was really meant for Israel to

go through, or the Jews, and all the other unbelievers, but the church would not be there. And the purpose of all of Israel going through this was to coerce them, through their suffering, to come to faith. It's kind of the general idea. Yeah? Yeah.

And he asserted that believers would escape this time of suffering. And of course, this theory, not at the time, but later became known as the rapture theory because they're going to be raptured out, right? And this belief was very popular. Why would it not be? I like it. I don't want to be, I mean, no, okay. I'm just saying, I'll be honest. I hope it's true, right? Hope it's true. But this is where it comes from.

In the early 1900s, 1909, Cyrus Schofield was putting together a reference Bible, a study Bible. And in the notes here in the States, across the sea from where Darby was, in his notes he put in Darby's commentaries about this dispensational view of the church being removed. Some of you may know of this Bible. It's called the Scofield Reference Bible. And under the influence of the study Bible, pre-tribulationism and the rapture spread far and wide across the U.S. This is the time when you start seeing these really charismatic prophecy conferences popping up all everywhere, and they were using this as the foundation. The end is near now. This view dominated specifically evangelical circles. High denominational traditions, right, weren't amused by it. They were like, "No, this isn't, no." Mainly evangelical circles.

And to be fair, looking back, Darby's views never suggested that Christians would never suffer. I want to make that clear. I don't want to misrepresent him. But what it ended up evolving as and causing is a mentality. A mentality that whenever we do suffer or feel like we're suffering, it must be the end times. It must be. From firsthand experience, this was the mentality I grew up with. There's something troubling. It must be a sign of the end times. This is the background of what led to the accusations during the Satanic Panic and the traumatization of young children in the church and the Left Behind series. Yeshua could return now. Hear what I'm saying?

But this pattern, this mentality, caused people to only meditate on Yeshua's returning only if they felt persecuted or troubled. And this is a reoccurring pattern that we need to break. Yeshua is returning. But if we enter into a troubling time, that is exactly the time when believers need to be in the trenches supporting people, giving people hope, and showing the work of Yeshua instead of telling people that the end is near and then isolating themselves.

The Mission During Difficult Times

Yeshua replicates himself through us replicating him. Why would the world ever care if you think Yeshua is returning when we haven't given them even the slightest reason to believe he is

the king, the Messiah, and the son of God? Or that a relationship with him will bring peace, contentment, love, and eternal life? Why would they care if we're running around saying the end is near if we've never given them any evidence or any example of why they should repent?

Yeshua warns us of that mentality, by the way, in Matthew chapter 25. Scary chapter. We don't like it. We like to put it in the background. Well done, you good and faithful servant. I left you with a job and you were faithful over it. You did it, good and faithful servant. You did not get distracted. You did not get scared. You did not get anxious. You did not bury it in the ground and try to ignore it. You did something with it. Later in the chapter, Good and faithful servant, I was hungry and you fed me. I was sick and you took care of me. You didn't find excuses to avoid the mission.

Yeshua says to endure through any and all tribulation until the end. Endure it. It means when troubling times come, you stand out and you push back. You push back, you stand firm because Yeshua says he will be with you. Do not give up on the mission. Don't stop being the servant and a Yeshua lookalike even when it looks scary. That is the time to shine.

Diving into Revelation 13

And so I wanted to take time to preface this message with that so we can dive into what John says. So [Revelation 13](#), you guys can turn with me so you can mark it. [Revelation 13](#). And at the beginning of [Revelation 13](#), if you remember reading it, you have a dragon that appears right at the beginning. Again, who's the dragon? Satan, the serpent, right? Right? So we have Satan, the personified forces of evil, the serpent, Satan himself. And he stands on the shoreline and he begins to call up his helpers, right? Right there on the shore, he calls up his helpers.

Now, like I said, last time we spoke about the dragon being defeated, he was thrown down to earth and now he's pushing one last ditch effort to manipulate and tear the saints away from God. And he does not do this personally here. Satan is not portrayed here as coming into your house and whispering in your ear. Right? No. In chapter 13, it is through his servants that he wants to manipulate, destroy, and tempt the believers to stray from God.

And so we have two beasts. I think I have a cool graphic I found, an old painting. Love it. Two beasts. He calls two beasts coming forth, and it's likely riffing off of the mythological chaos monsters in the Bible, Leviathan and Bohemoth, right? One of the beasts comes from the sea, and the other one rises out of the land. Right?

The one that comes out of the sea has seven heads, right? And one of the heads has a fatal wound that kills the whole beast. The whole beast has a fatal wound, right? But he comes back

from the dead and shocks the world. Later in the chapter, it says he was struck by a sword. Most believe this is an echo from Caesar Nero, who committed suicide with a sword when the empire was at its most vulnerable state in 68 AD. There were revolts happening during his reign right then and there. There was a civil war known as the Year of the Four Caesars. I mean, it was the first civil war of the unified Roman Empire. And it was a civil war and even his own tyranny had exhausted the provinces. His death, some historians believe, would have been a reason to give up all hope on the future. Here comes the fall of Rome. It was a fatal ruin.

But somehow the beast evolved. The beast came back. And it's a parody of the slain lamb being resurrected. The difference between the slain lamb being resurrected and the beast coming back to life is, well, the beast's resurrection does not negate its defeat. The dragon was thrown down from heaven in the last chapter, and this is how he's going after the saints and the children of the woman. The beast represents the power of empire. Of emperors and the empirical worship and politics that allow it to expand throughout the world. It represents the leaders of the nations that Satan is influencing to do his will, just like we've discussed.

The Leviathan: Chaos Across Cultures

I think I have a slide of an old Sumerian cylinder seal that I want to geek out for a minute. So nerd moment, playing it, right? This is an old Sumerian cylinder seal. So how they would do seals in the ancient Near East is they would have these little roly seals. Imagine like a cork, but it's stone and it has images around it and you'd seal it on wax or on paper or whatnot. And if you notice, there's a monster in the middle. And this is the mythological sea monster of chaos in Babylonian myth or Sumerian myth at this point. Pretty much every culture had one and there's even one in the Bible known as Leviathan. Leviathan was this chaos monster. He represents the forces of chaos, or we would call it wickedness and evil, but the forces that come upon the world that destroy justice and destroy order and make everything collapse and cause war and famine and just everything gets out of order. All nations kind of believed in this. And so here is a depiction of the Leviathan in Sumer. We don't have a depiction of what the biblical authors believed Leviathan looked like. I want to backtrack and clarify something. In Sumer, they didn't call this mythological creature Leviathan. It was another name. But I want you to notice how many heads are on the Leviathan in the Sumerian myth. Four heads are leaning down. It looks like they're being killed one by one by one of the warriors there. I forget who that is. And then three heads on top, seven heads on this sea monster that comes out. Now, what's neat is [Psalm 74](#), 14. This is a great section. Some would call this the third creation story. It places God crushing the heads of Leviathan, all of the heads of Leviathan, and then chopping it

up and giving the food for everybody to eat. And then it proceeds to talk about him bringing forth the sun and the moon and the stars. It's defeating chaos so he brings order. But I found that relevant because here we have something that Revelation talks about. It's a sea monster that has seven heads. I don't know if John was riffing off that idea, but it would not be far-fetched to believe he was, or at least incorporating it. Because the Leviathan of ancient myth would have been how the nations act and crumble in chaos and wickedness and injustice, how they trample the saints of the world, just like [Daniel 7](#) prophesied. So that was my nerd-out moment. Thank you for enduring.

The Second Beast From the Earth

I think we have another slide that we're going to get into, but that was the first beast. Comes out of the sea, represents the government, represents the empire and the politics of destruction and wickedness and self-serving agendas from the empire that trample the world. Then, later in the chapter, we have another beast that arises, and they worship the dragon, right? And he gave power to the beast, right? The dragon is in control of all of this. The beasts are the puppets of the dragon in their pursuits to overtake the world with politics and imperial agendas. Then John sees a second beast rising from the earth, the land beast. And he has two horns like a lamb. Looks like a lamb. Second beast. And I feel like this is the most important part right here. Pay attention to this. Nothing else, pay attention to this. The book of Revelation is not a crystal ball, right? It's not something you look into to try to figure out what's going to happen in the future. The book of Revelation is a discipleship manual, okay, that was given to seven real churches and it was also given to you.

A Letter for Today's Churches

The second beast has two horns like a lamb, but it speaks with the voice of the dragon. It gets the world to worship the first beast. It performs signs like making fire come down from heaven. It works in the midst of the first beast without being directly connected to it. And it gives power to the image of the beast. It fuels it. It gives it the vitality it needs, even so it can slay those who don't bow down to the image of the first beast. Do you guys notice the religious language here of the second beast? It has two horns, possibly a reference to the goat or the ram in Daniel chapter 8, but more likely a parody, another parody on the two witnesses, the two olive trees, the two lampstands, the believers, etc. of the lamb, the followers of the lamb. It looks like that. Later, the beast is known as the false prophet, religious title. It calls down fire from heaven like Elijah, and it facilitates worship of the beast like the priests facilitate worship to Yahweh. Oh,

and it looks like a lamb. You're ready to get uncomfortable? Remember, this is a theopolitical letter to encourage hope as well as boldness for the seven churches John was writing to. This letter, guys, this letter was not written to you. It was written for you. But it was written to seven literal churches. Just like all of Paul's letters and most of the Bible, it was not written to you, but it was written for you. You understand that, the difference?

Satan's Strategy: Religion and Empire

Rome's political atmosphere and its pursuit of conquering in the name of peace, Pax Romana, was only successful because they had a genius strategy of blending the religious themes and tones and myths of the people. Satan uses religion to empower world empires to do his will. Because if he can get the people to think that they're serving their God, when in reality they're serving his agents, he wins. If the devil can make you think you are worshiping God and how you support the empire and the politics and the leaders, you're following him and you may not even realize it. That's the message here to the churches in Rome. And that's what this chapter is all about. So much so that the leaders — this is how far Rome went. They did not stop. Remember the first message we did, Hope Revealed? We talked a lot about the propaganda of Rome. Caesar, starting with Julius, began to be deified from God or gods themselves. In other words, when you pledge loyalty and support to Caesar, you are on the side of the gods, right? And that was the goal of the propaganda. Not everybody went for it, but generally speaking, that was the standard. You're worshiping the gods through your allegiance to Rome and the empire. And for a Roman citizen, you definitely would want to be on the side of the gods, right? Even Judea was forced to participate under Roman occupation. Rome allowed the Jews to continue worshiping their god in their temple. "You guys don't have to bow down to all of our gods. But you do have to offer two sacrifices a day in your temple, not for Yahweh, but on behalf of Rome, on behalf of Caesar and the Romans." Josephus writes about that in the War of the Jews. Imagine your children growing up seeing that. Like, how would you explain that as far as religion goes? I don't know. This is the effects.

The Imperial Cult

I'm trying to figure that out. This was known as something called the imperial cult, where Rome evolved the religion of the people into a state religion. Everybody good? How you doing? That was a lot. Okay. The first beast represents the embodiment of the empire, the leaders, the politics, and how it is doing the work of Satan, ultimately. The second beast represents the religious influence that supports the beast, that draws attention to the beast, that causes the

people to be loyal to the beast, the religious leaders who point the people to worship them. And this beast speaks like the dragon, right? The serpent, like in the garden, deceptive, causing people to believe that they're doing the will of the gods by pointing them to the state religion.

The Gods of Rome

What Rome did, they instigated the idea that Rome was chosen by the gods through propaganda, such as national hymns, stories of their country being founded by the gods, right? The story of Romulus and Remus and such. These were stories, the backbone of everything Rome was, and they would stamp religious sayings and slogans on all of their coins, of course. Allegiance to the icon of Rome became a form of worship. This is the beast that gives the first beast its power. And it has been used in empires and nations ever since because it works too well. It's just too effective. Imagine if you can get people to believe that their nation or empire or country is on God's side along with its selective allies, like everyone else isn't. You know what I mean? Like if Rome is on the side of the gods, that means everyone else who is either neutral or opposed to Rome, like they only wish they could be on God's side like we are. And even believers fell for this. That's possibly the background of the synagogue of Satan in chapters 2 and 3. Those who have leaned over toward Satan. The believers who have leaned over and said, "You know what? It's okay. We're still allegiant to God, but we're over here too." The beast that exists to consume other nations, to conquer, enslave for wealth and exploit the weak, to make the elite rich. The beast is described as looking like a leopard and it has feet like a bear and the mouth of a lion. And this is not the UN building that's in New York. Stop, stop it. It does not have those attributes. This is a reference to the four beasts in [Daniel 7](#).

Daniel's Messianic Vision

Remember [Daniel 7](#)? Awesome messianic chapter. This is the gospel message, right? And it talks about all of these beasts that are trampling the world, and there's one really big beast that just wears out the saints and kills them, trampling the saints. And then something happens involving this figure called the Son of Man. And it seems that the beast kills the people, which is also representative of the Son of Man. So he kills the Son of Man and somehow through his killing of the Son of Man, trampling on the Son of Man, the beast is defeated while the Son of Man comes in the clouds of heaven, not down to earth, but to heaven to be enthroned and his kingdom lasts forever and ever. It's so good, right? That's what Yeshua was talking about. Caiaphas, you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, being exalted. He wasn't talking about coming back to earth. You're about to see me be exalted as king and I'm gonna be

lifted up. I will be enthroned in a way that you won't even recognize, but know that I am that one being exalted. And he was exalted up on a cross. He was given a crown and a placard was hung upon his head declaring him the king of the Jews. And all the Gentiles thought it was foolishness. But in that moment, he was enthroned with all power and authority, defeating death and defeating the beast once and for all, creating the new greater Exodus.

One Beast United

So in [Daniel 7](#), there are four beasts—a big beast, and then there's three other beasts: a leopard, a bear, a lion, right? And these four beasts in [Daniel 7](#) represent four specific nations that Daniel's prophesying will come and go, and they will be these beasts, consecutive nations, right? John here takes those elements and he forms them into one singular beast, right? It's not going to be that nation's a beast and that nation's a beast and this nation is a beast. The secular power is coming up just wanting to obtain power and wealth through killing and injustice. No, he combines them all. He says there's one beast. There's one beast. And it may be called by many names. It may be represented by many flags. But there's one beast that is always opposed to the kingdom of God and the rule of Yeshua. It's so bold. John forms all of this into one beast. And it is Satan's tool to subvert the kingdom of God. At least that's the trajectory here. That's the story. That's the movie that's being played. How does Satan go after the saints? By using the beasts. The beast of the land deceptively causes the people and the people of God to focus on the beast of the sea rather than the king of the throne. Look over here. And the worst part of it is the people worshiping the beast believe with all of their hearts that they're worshiping God or the gods.

Imperial Cultism in Ancient Rome

With these lenses of imperial cultism in ancient Rome, imagine the patriotism of the citizens of Rome. Like imagine the level of dedication and loyalty they portrayed, thinking that they are embodying the mission of the gods through their loyalty to the empire, which was founded by the gods and does the will of the gods. Do you guys see the weight of what's being portrayed here? This is what first century believers were facing. This is what the early churches were facing. This was the temptation. Listen, just keep one foot in, one foot in.

The Crusades: Low-Hanging Fruit

A great example of how this evolved throughout history is the Crusades. That's the low-hanging fruit example. Crusades, all of Western Europe under the influence of the church. And you can't

say the Catholic church. Protestant hadn't happened yet. This was the church. The church marched toward Jerusalem because they were fighting for God. They were doing God's will, raping, pillaging, and mercilessly killing along the way. During the sieges of Antioch and Jerusalem, these Christian warriors massacred the inhabitants of the city. They slaughtered Jews, Christians, and Muslims, all alike. Not soldiers, men, women, children—the inhabitants of the city who lived there, who called it home. One historian at the time wrote that 70,000 people were killed and slaughtered because this is our country and this is God's country and this is what we do to do God's will and we are on a mission from God.

When Empires Corrupt Religion

And what [Revelation 13](#) should be calling us to do today is always be vigilant about where our worship is directed. Where is your worship directed? In the 1930s, Nazi propagandists attempted their own imperial cult experiment. They were pushing essentially a denomination in Germany known as the German Evangelical Church. And it rose to a popular place. It sure did. I think we have a picture. Here we go. Here we go. This is a photo outside of one of the churches where services are starting. Here you have the storm troopers standing outside holding banners with the cross on one side and the imperial flag or the national icon on the other side. Can you imagine a place where in a church you have the imperial flag next to the cross, combining the two kingdoms into one? And in their world, what they were trying to do is make them synonymous. So when you saluted the Nazi flag or when you saluted the empire of Germany, it was a form of worship to God because this is God's country. This is God's kingdom.

Now, this experiment did not last too long. It did end up failing. They brought it down a few years later, I believe. But the damage had already been done. Religion was intimately mixed in with the Nazi agenda, right? Arianism was a form of religious worship to Jesus. Can you imagine? It was expected as a Christian duty to pledge your allegiance to Germany. Can you imagine that one believer? I forget the photo. There's a great photo of everyone doing the salute. I think it was at a Hitler rally or something. There's one guy in the middle of them that's not raising his arm. Very popular picture. I should have thrown it in. Can you imagine being that one believer that did not salute the Nazi flag at this time period? He was not very popular. What's wrong with you? What's wrong with you?

Politicians and Faith in Modern Times

Guys, history gives us a warning. I believe the biblical text gives us a warning. When politicians tell you that they're a Christian, it does not mean that it is God's will for you to vote for them. It

does not. Every presidential candidate does this. Every one. Every single one. Why? Because it's low-hanging fruit for a country that is predominantly Christian. Every president. President Biden did it. Former President Trump did it. Former President Obama did it. Former President George W. did it. Everybody does it. Everybody does it. I remember when First Lady Jill Biden was on an interview, I think after the election, and I think she was talking about her faith. I don't remember. But she was wearing a St. Peter's cross necklace. And many that are ignorant of Orthodox Christian symbols and history started spreading the claim that she's a Satanist. Because St. Peter's cross is an inverted cross, right? And some Orthodox Christians view it as a sign of faith to remember humility. That even they, like Peter in the tradition, are not deserving to be crucified like Christ. It's an inverted cross. It is not like some niche thing. It is something that's criticized, but all the best are talking about their faith publicly in the political realm.

Revealing Religious Deception

More than that, Revelation is not speaking of the politicians and leaders of the various countries and empires, but of religious leaders who are coercing people to direct their focus, their zeal, their love, and their worship toward the beast of the sea and away from the king of kings. Be aware of that. Be aware of that. When a Christian pastor or evangelist or prophet makes their message more about the allegiance to the government and the political candidate that is on God's side, as Revelation depicts, it gets a little too similar to what we're reading here. It should make us nervous. Be wary when any government—we have many people joining us on live stream that aren't from the US, watching from all over the world. Be wary when any government wants to entice you with familiar religious elements in their governmental practices and events. And be wary when a flag of a nation is exalted in the place that is supposed to be dedicated to God and his kingdom only. We have to be careful. Just like John is writing to the first century believers, you have to be careful. You must be careful.

A Triggering Subject

I'll bring up a triggering subject. January 6th, 2021. Guys, I don't know where you stand on that day, how you feel about that day. I think we can all agree that was a bad day. No good things came from that day. And the reason I bring that up is because I was interested. A lot of commotion was going on. Millions of people went out. It was an incredible thing just to witness. And someone was live streaming on Facebook, so I joined in the live stream. And I'm like, what is happening? And it was a pastor. And I wanted to see what's up. What's going on over there? What kind of ruckus is going on? And he was leading a prayer group on Capitol

Hill. And his prayer was that God's victory would come to pass and that Satan would be defeated on that day. May your victory come to pass, oh Lord. And in his prayer, he asked God to bless these patriots who stood here today.

Now, praying's good. Praying for your nation? Oh my gosh, pray for this nation. Oh my gosh, pray for the leaders of this nation. And you know you fall in a trap when you only pray for certain leaders and not others? That's how you know you've fallen in the trap.

God in a Box

That's how you know when you think that God is on your side and not their side. I'm only going to pray for the president that I want to pray for. Another president gets elected, I'm going to pray for him.

Shallow does our faith get when we put God in a box and we only want him to be restricted and controlled by us. The issue and what disturbed me most about this prayer that was prayed isn't that he was praying for the country. God, use this country and use every political leader. They are corrupt. They are corrupt. We always agree on that until election season comes and then it's like everyone but the one. They're all corrupt, we know that. We know history, right? But why don't we pray that God will soften their hearts and his kingdom would be made and a glimpse of glory would be made through them. My problem with this prayer is according to his prayer, God was defeated that day. Because obviously, what his prayer meant was that President Trump would be reelected and that would be a sign that God was victorious. And guess what? Guess what? What? God was defeated by Satan on January 6, 2021.

Slipping Into Idolatry

We have to be so careful that we do not allow our zeal to misrepresent the boldness of faith that Yeshua had and the scale and the vision that he had for God's kingdom crashing into this world. We have to be so careful to stand against the beast while not worshiping the beast. The moment we take our faith in God's reign and his kingdom and make it a part of our national identity, our national devotion, we have to be so careful, guys, that's a slipping into idolatry. That is the moment when we have been enticed by the false prophet. And that's exactly what John is warning of and what his vision is of. When believers think they're worshiping the lamb through the worship of the beast. In Rome, it was compromise and engaging likely with civic centers where many times there were the places of the temples of the gods, right? They would be giving loyalty to Caesar and Jesus.

Influencing vs. Becoming

Guys, this is a very hard topic to talk about, especially in the South. And hear what I'm saying. I believe it is absolutely idolatry when we try to make and we believe our nation is the kingdom of God instead of working to influence it with the kingdom of God. There's a difference. And in the United States, maybe everywhere in the world and other nations, in the United States today, that line is so blurry that we can't even tell the difference.

Please don't think I'm saying not to be involved in politics. This great nation that we reside in, which is a blessing to many, some, has given its citizens certain privileges. Certain privileges. And these certain privileges allow us to allegedly influence the politics of this nation. Not many nations even give that out. No, not many nations even offer that opportunity.

Exploit That

Guys, exploit the snot out of that. Exploit that. Protest that. and vote to not leave the outcasts of society behind and put them at the front of the line, like Yeshua says. Protest so that none would be oppressed and so that the voices of those crying out would not be snuffed out. Protest that. Protest that those who the majority want to push to the sidelines are lifted up, that they are no longer viewed as lesser and undeserving, no matter what background, what race, what culture they're from.

Your King Shares His Throne with No One

Do it, but don't get confused on who your king is and where your loyalty lies. And don't think your loyalty to the beast is the same as your loyalty to God. Your king shares his throne with no one. Christian churches ran to the streets during the civil rights movement to protest and throw rocks at Martin Luther King as he walked down the street because it was a threat to their national way of life. And obviously it was a threat to God and God's will. Your faith identity should never be made synonymous with your national identity.

Citizenship in Heaven

In [Philippians 3.20](#), Paul makes a bold statement, and I use the amplified version, right? It says, but we are different because our citizenship is in heaven. And from there, we eagerly await the coming of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says to the first century believers, your citizenship does not belong to Rome. Your citizenship is already claimed. And it is to the kingdom of God, heaven.

The Beasts of Revelation

So [Revelation 13](#), 16. Here we go. You guys good? We have developed where John seems to be going with the dragon and how you have the beast of the sea, which represents the empirical forces, the beast, right, that conquers. And then you have the beast of the land that comes up. And the beast of the land is coercing people to worship the beast of the sea. And in doing so, they yield to the authority of the dragon, who's Satan. Very bold. Gosh, makes me uncomfortable.

Which Beast?

So now we get to the end of the chapter where this very controversial set of verses lies. Starting at verse 16. Let's see here. So first question, which beast is this? We know there's two, right? Already let the cat out of the bag. This is the beast of the land. The beast of the land is the one who marks his followers. The false prophet, the religious influence that tempts the people to worship the other beast, the empire through their allegiance.

And when I say allegiance and loyalty, like in the Roman standard in all nations today, if you give your allegiance to someone or a king, it's not partial. You guys realize that? Like I'm giving my allegiance to Jacob Salvo, like Jacob. Like, it's not like I'm going to give my allegiance to him and Josh Inslee. Like, that doesn't, like, I'm loyal to you guys, you're my friends, but if I'm giving my allegiance to the King of France and to the King of England. That's not allegiance, that's fickleness, right? You're either 100% loyal to that or not at all, right? And so giving your allegiance to the Roman Empire was giving it 100%. And it could not go anywhere else. And the issue that John and Paul and Yeshua has with this is you've now muddied the water to your allegiance to God. Where's your allegiance to God? How diluted is your allegiance or your concept of your allegiance to God now? That is the beast that marks its loyal servants. And that's why this is such a big deal.

What Is the Mark?

So what is this mark of the beast? This is a question everybody sat through all that junk to hear. I know. What is this thing? Well, when John was writing his letter and his visions, he got to the very last verse of [Revelation 13](#) and then he stopped, right? And he was like, okay, new chapter. And so he went and he wrote C-H-A-P-T-E-R, chapter 14, right? And then he started another chapter. You guys know that's not how the Bible was written at all, okay? This was one

continuous thought, maybe with different theaters in it, one continuous thought. So what is the thought right after this section? What is the continuation? Chapter 14, verse 1.

The Lamb's Mark

Then I looked, and there was a lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000, who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads. Where was the mark of the beast? It's on your hand or your forehead. And what was the mark of the beast? It was the name of the beast. But then John's like, but then I saw the followers of the lamb and they had the lamb's name on their forehead. The same thing is mentioned in [Revelation 7](#), 3. Put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God. [Revelation 22](#), 3. John here is intentionally contrasting the mark of the beast to the seal of the mark of God. The faithful followers who give their allegiance to the beast wear his mark. The faithful followers who give their allegiance to the lamb wear his mark.

Whose Name Do You Wear?

Whose name do you wear? And it's a hyperlink all the way back to Numbers chapter 6, verse 27, right? Where God says, so I will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them. That's the context of the commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain, by the way. Has nothing to do with saying, oh my gosh, or even cussing. That's not good. Don't do that. But the biblical context is about God's reputation that you carry. You're carrying his name. Are you shaming it, right? Right? How does the world perceive who God is through you? It's a sign of faithfulness, allegiance toward a kingdom and loyalty.

Spiritual Marks, Not Literal Ones

Now, can you guys literally see the mark of God on people's foreheads, the followers of God? You can see through their actions, absolutely. You can't actually see it? I'm sure someone somewhere got a tattoo. I don't know, but you can't actually see it. If that's the case here, then can you see the literal seal on someone's forehead of a non-believer or a follower of the beast? These are two parallel spiritual natures, and the intention of them to be compared is evident by John contrasting them directly after each other. Believers are protected by the power of Christ's name, which is his presence with them. They may suffer, they may even die, yet they will receive the ultimate reward of eternal life as illustrated in [Revelation 23](#).

The Greek word for mark, stamp, mark of the beast, is indicated of being some type of stamping, like a stamp or a seal. Like the seals that were used to create Roman propaganda on all of their coins through their currency. Again, we went way deep in that in the very first message here. But, yeah, it's a sign of the Lord. They used to stamp the face of Caesar on the coins and put religious slogans around it to deify him on the coins. One of them actually says, and we'll talk about that next week, one of them actually says the son of God, Caesar Augustus, on the denarius. And the idea is, again, when people hold the coins and they're involved with the economic system, they're acknowledging that religious overtone with everything that they do to support Rome.

It could also refer, possibly, to a branding or a tattoo like was put on slaves. Could be the context. So you have the image of the name of the lamb being on the foreheads of those, right? And then you have the name of the beast written on others. This is who they belong to. Further evidence that this is not trying to illustrate some type of literal marking: We have the beast itself has blasphemous names written on its head. And this isn't the first time that we see a marking on someone's hand and forehead in the Bible, by the way, in the Torah. Israel was told to wear a sign on their hands and their forehead to mark their continual devotion and loyalty to God. It's in Exodus chapter 13, verse 9. It's also mentioned in [Deuteronomy 6](#). "And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand and a memorial between your eyes." And this is the sign. This is the sign you will wear. It's not a literal mark.

Everything in Revelation Is Symbolic

Everything in Revelation, from when the vision begins, is symbolic per the genre of the text. Revelation is a theopolitical book contrasting the politics of the upside-down kingdom of God and the politics of the beast, the empires of the world. In Revelation, the Roman Empire. The beast that exploits the weak and the poor, the beast that claims it stands for justice while committing and furthering injustice, enslaving the weak and exploiting them for wealth, wreaking havoc throughout the world, causing violence and war for political and financial gain, but all the while acts as a parody of God. Which political party are you in? That's the message here. That's the question that John is asking these seven churches. Who are you truly supporting? Will you commit yourself in absolute loyalty, fight for and defend and make excuses and celebrate the political party of the beast? Or will you stand in contrast representing the politics of the lamb, bearing his sign?

The politics of the lamb, where the hungry are fed, where the naked are clothed, where the minorities and the outcasts of society are put in the front of the line, where violence is

condemned and forgiveness is mandated. And this should be made evident by the mark that you bear. The mark you bear is seen on your forehead. This is your ideological commitment as well as your practice. A.K.A. you're known by your fruit. Your fruit manifests the political kingdom in which you're a part of.

Known by Your Fruit

Guys, want to know what 666 means? We're going to talk about that next week because it's a lot. I hope this message was at least edifying in some way. God's word was written and passed down generation to generation to be delivered to you. How will you handle it? How will you meditate on it? How will you allow it to transform your view of the world?

Whose Side Is God On?

We have to stop making our first question in every single type of pseudo conflict that the world pushes on us. We have to stop making our question, "Is God on their side or is God on my side?" We have to stop thinking that and promoting this idea that God is on my side of that political candidate. Of course God is on my side. And if God's on my side, then God's definitely not on their side. And the irony of that? Guess what the other side's thinking, right? We go to war and because of our national boundaries and our national lenses, we want to pray for our country and our soldiers. Do pray for your soldiers. Absolutely. But we'll never pray for any other soldiers involved in the conflict. That's them. They're not on God's side.

Meanwhile, that country, guess what they're doing for their soldiers? They're praying for them. They ain't praying for yours. Where have we lost our way in putting our faith in national boundaries all over the world? What happened to praying for all of mankind? What happened to praying that if these are our enemies, isn't that something Yeshua said to do? We had a visitor one time and really upset him. I didn't mean to. They wanted to know if we could have a national night of prayer for Israel. I said, yeah, I think that would be fantastic. Can we also carve out time to pray for Palestine as well, the Palestinians and the West Bank? Can we pray for the leaders of Hamas? Can we lift up Hezbollah, that God would actually work through them and cause a transformation that's allegedly been experienced in our lives? They didn't like that. Because why would we ever pray for people who are our enemies? Why would we ever ask God to actually do something miraculous to show his power and make his power known? Because we have blinders on.

The moment you ask the question "Whose side is God on?" I would submit that's the moment we find ourselves in the garden just like Eve, wondering if that voice is actually speaking truth. The Bible tells us whose side he's on.

The Commander of the Army of the Lord

By the way, after Moses dies, Joshua was appointed as the leader over the Israelites, and they enter the land of their enemies, the Canaanites, right? You know the story? They enter the land, and in this story, Joshua is coming and he's probably scouting out, right? Joshua chapter five. He's about to attack. How am I going to take out this Jericho? Big walls, right? Big old walls. And he comes in contact with a man with a sword drawn. And Joshua asks a completely logical question. You guys remember what it is? Are you for us or are you for our enemies? Where are you? Where are you? You remember how he responded? Neither. Who was this guy? Oh, he was the commander of the armies of Yahweh. Neither. Neither. Neither, right? Do you think I'm on your side? Neither. The commander of the army of the Lord.

Now, let's back up. Joshua is the authorized leader of Israel. Israel is the only nation that Yahweh made a covenant with at Mount Sinai. He is the one who told them to enter the land and drive out the Canaanites. It was his promise. And yet, with all of these factors, the commander of Yahweh's army will not pledge allegiance to either side. God is not on their side in this story. And guess what? Using this story as the background, he's not on ours either when it comes to us versus them. God does not take sides. He didn't then in this story, and he doesn't now. And how we lower the character of God when we depict him as someone who needs to come down and choose allegiance based on our preference.

I don't believe God is on our side. We are the ones that must decide whether we're going to be on God's side. He refused to back human agendas. He calls us, we don't call him. It is us that needs to learn to surrender in loyalty to him and obedience to his will, not him to show us which preference he's gonna stand in or which lesser evil he's going to endorse.

Obedience Brings Victory

Joshua got this immediately. He falls down on his face before the angel of Yahweh, asking if God has a command for him. "I will be obedient to you. What is your side? I wanna be there." If Yahweh was not unmistakably on the side of the Israelites, his covenant people that he redeemed from slavery to Egypt, that he led through the Exodus journey all the way across the

wilderness, that he gave the land of promise, if Yahweh was not on their side here, then why do we think he's on ours by default?

God does not side with Republicans and he does not side with Democrats. He doesn't side with the United States. He doesn't side with Israel for that matter. Instead, he asks us for our full allegiance and obedience to him. It's Old Testament scholar Carmen Ames. She's amazing. She says our allegiance to anyone other than the God of the Bible is idolatry. And that is what got so many Christians killed in the first century. That's what got them killed. It wasn't their faith in a God. It was the fact that they would not compromise their allegiance to the empire of Rome. That is what gets Christians persecuted in North Korea today.

Matt, you are doing a fantastic job taking all these verses from Joshua way out of context. Just stretching, stretching, stretching. Really? Oh, I know the feeling. What happens next in the story? God tells them what they need to do to go defeat Jericho, right? Chapter 6. He gives them the commands. Israel follows them. They walk around, toot the horns, do the thing. Right? They do it. They follow the commands. And guess what? They got on God's side. Because God is the one fighting the battles, right? Jericho falls. And Israel's feeling a bit good about it, right? Like, this works. This is cool, right? This whole God-with-us thing, this is good. And so they go on to the next town, and they look at it. They're like, let's take it out. We got a track record to keep. Let's do it. And Joshua looks and he says... they don't have that many people there. Take two or 3,000 people. There's no point in making the whole army weary by going to attack this city. Just send a couple thousand. You got this. And they go and they're chased off like little rats having rocks thrown at them and they're defeated.

Stepping Out from God's Side

Why were they defeated? One Israelite disobeyed the commands of God at Jericho. Someone stepped out from being on God's side. God wasn't going to be on their side because they didn't follow his commands. They didn't let it be his battle. Achan took the goods from Jericho, hid them under his tent. You guys know the story? Because he did that. The battle of Jericho was not to make them rich. It was not to benefit them for any reason. It wasn't there for their freedoms, for their rights or their wealth. They were to fight out of obedience. They lost because they forgot that.

Despite the prayer of that misguided pastor on Capitol Hill, God did not lose the last election and he did not win it either. God was never running for office in any of our elections. And if we can stop believing that God supports our political party or God supports our preferred candidate

or our preferred politics, then maybe we can start marking ourselves with his name instead of that of the beast. When we approach political involvement in this nation, it should always be through the lens of the cross, through humility, and as fully pledged citizens of heaven. That is how we engage in these politics of this nation. And that is how we engage in politics of every nation that we find ourselves in and citizens of. That is how we change the world. We have to be so careful that our zeal is not misguided and that we don't make our faith into something we want it to be instead of what it's supposed to be.

God's Allegiance and Our Politics

And so I don't know where you're at today, but I hope we can at least take time to meditate on what it means to wear the name of the beast and take its mark. And this could be through many forms. This could be through the form of disobedience, idolatry. It comes in the form of turning your back on the ways of God. It comes in the form of turning your back on the love of Yeshua and the mission you were sent on. It comes in the form of unforgiveness and bitterness towards others. It comes in the form of sin and the giving in of lust and the giving in of gossip. And it comes in the form of believing God is on your side so that you're able to live your life the way that you want and make your faith into what you want instead of what he told you it should be.

The message of Revelation is one of ultimate faithfulness. And so with that said, are you on God's side or do you expect him to be on yours? Are you living in a way that exalts the beast or the lamb? Are you living in a place of fear where you feel anxious because of the uncertainty of the times that we live in?

Freedom from Fear

Guys, I got a message for you today. God can take that away from you right now. You can leave that here right now. And it's so ironic because, for me, this is my experience. Most of the times that we say "don't live in fear and have faith over the fear," most of the times I'm kind of faking it. Fake it till I make it, right? God is in control, guys. We sang that during worship. Do we believe it? And he's calling us to be freed from the shackles that hold us back, proclaiming his kingdom fully to the world by courageously standing in the midst of trials unmoved and bravely engaging with the world so that they would see the hope that you have in the King of Kings.

Remember which kingdom you're a part of and act accordingly always. And that is no strong mission. This is the mission that will get you killed as a Christian. And it is the mission that will get you killed by other Christians because it happens far too often. And so please stand.

Worship team, you guys can come up. Please stand as we conclude worship and join me in prayer.

Standing Together in Prayer

Alvina Mokenu, our Father, our King. Father, we thank you for this opportunity to dive into your word, and we thank you for the Holy Spirit that you said is already within us and that raises us to life. And Father, I ask in the name of Yeshua right now today that you would allow us to take the lenses off that are blinding us to the things in our life that we need to leave here today so that we can truly be free. Whether it be fear, whether it be lust, whether it be gossip, whether it be the assumption that you're on our side so that we can live however we want to live and justify it. Father, I ask in the name of Yeshua that this would be revealed to us today so that we can repent, so that we can fully take your mark upon us, so that we can proudly display your name through our actions and represent your kingdom well to the fullness of our ability through the power and authority of the Holy Spirit that you've given us today. Father, that we can forgive our enemies and that we do not harbor bitterness. And Father, that we see all through the lens of the cross. No matter what our nation tells us, we shouldn't. No matter who we're told our enemies are, that we would see them covered in your grace and running into your arms. And that would be what our prayers shout.

We thank you, Father, for the ability to be in this nation that you planted us. And we thank you for the ability to represent yours and to influence it and to stand as your warriors. In the name of Yeshua, we pray as your mighty warriors. Amen.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. May the God of patience and encouragement grant you to be like-minded with one another in the manner of Messiah so that together with one voice you glorify the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah. Amen. Shabbat Shalom. Shalom.

I'm Matthew Vanderells, and I hope you enjoyed this message. Founded in Truth exists to build a community that bears the image of God and lives the redeemed life only Yeshua gives. If this message impacted you or if this ministry has been a blessing to you, we invite you to take part in making sure the message of Yeshua and the truth of God's word continues to reach others. To make sure this happens, you can donate through our online giving portal at foundinatruth.com/give or by texting any amount to 704-275-0752. Don't forget to like and subscribe for new content every single week. And we thank you for your continued support. And we look forward to seeing you next time. Shalom.

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