

The Mark of the Beast

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Much has been made of the “Mark of the Beast” (cf. Rev. 13:16-17). This subject has given rise to much of the current (and past) end-time sensationalism. Various writers describe how the (supposed end-time bad guy) antichrist will order such a “mark” to be tattooed on our hand or forehead. Perhaps you have seen illustrations in various end-time writings depicting such a scene.

The Universal Product Code is often interpreted as being the infamous mark of the beast. Sensationalistic prophecy writer and television evangelist, Jack Van Impe, suggests another possibility for the mark of the beast, though he carefully avoids getting too specific. He writes:

“Could information embedded in tiny biochips be the personal end-time ID code we are warned of in the Bible?” (Jack Van Impe. 2001: *On the Edge of Eternity*, 78).

One has to wonder how dispensationalists like Van Impe (who pride themselves on their “literal” approach to the Scriptures) can make a biochip under the skin equal to a mark on the skin.

Dispensationalists Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy believe the mark will be: “...the actual number 666, not a representation.”

They indicate the mark will be “on the person, not in him or her” and will be “visible to the naked eye.” (Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *Fast Facts on Bible Prophecy*, 130).

As computer technologies advance, be assured that more fantastic and far-fetched interpretations of “the mark” will be offered. While these types of concepts make interesting end-time reading, there is no biblical truth to them.

There is no denying that technology exists today whereby one could be identified by a biochip implanted under the skin. This may even become a standard system of identification in the future. However, is this what John, the inspired author of the book of Revelation, was describing? Would his first century readers have been able to “heed the things which are written in it” (Rev. 1:3)? Remember, these were “things which must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1). John was told, “The time is near” (Rev. 1:3). Words spoken in the first century such as, soon and near, clearly eliminate any two-thousand year later type of application. There had to be a direct application to John’s original audience. So what exactly is the mark of the beast?

Of first importance in properly identifying this mark is determining whether it is literal or symbolic. Dispensationalists insist it is a literal mark. However, in the same chapter, they see the beast with seven heads and ten horns as being symbolic. Why is “the beast” symbolic but the “mark of the beast” literal? In a book full of symbolic language, it seems much more consistent to consider the mark as also being symbolic. In this way, it would appear to be merely representative of one’s allegiance to the beast.

We hear a lot of talk from prophecy writers about the mark of the beast, but not much about the mark of the Lamb. Few people today are even aware that Revelation describes such “a mark.” The mark of the Lamb was a mark (or seal) identifying the people of God.

Saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads” (Revelation 7:3).

Was this a literal seal on the foreheads of the servants of God? Are we to believe that God will tattoo UPC codes or implant computer chips into His bond-servants? No! This was a symbolic sealing. We see same marking of His people later in Revelation (cf. Rev. 9:4; 14:1). This seal on the foreheads of God's people was simply an indication of their allegiance to God, and not to the beast. The symbolic language used in this regard is taken from the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 13:8-9; 28:36-38; Dt. 6:4-9). Notice this Old Testament example from Ezekiel:

The Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare (Ezekiel 9:4-5 Emphasis Mine).

This "mark" was symbolic of the fact that the righteous were not to be hurt in the punishment that was being described to Ezekiel. God was not asking the prophet to go through the city and literally put a mark on the foreheads of the righteous.

All this considered, consistency with the Scriptures, and the language of Revelation, would indicate the mark of the beast to be symbolic. It was a means of distinguishing between two classes of people: Those who served God, and those who served the beast. Such an interpretation is nowhere near as exciting as computer chips implanted under the skin, or UPC lines tattooed on the skin. However, it is (allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture) a very sound explanation of a text that has been overly sensationalized and greatly misapplied.