

I would like for us to consider in our thoughts today some of the teachings of premillennialism on the subject of the Mark of the Beast. We have mentioned before that the premillennest hold the view that there will be seven years of tribulation following the rapture of the saints. In those seven years, the temple will be rebuilt and controlled by the antichrist. The mark of the beast will identify the followers of the antichrist.

We need to go to Revelation 13 for our text. A final battle with the woman is mentioned in Revelation 12:17 and is detailed by John in chapters 13 & 14. Believers were called to recognize the two great armies described as beast that was involved in the conflict. These beasts are allies to Satan. Those Christians that were in God's army would be facing an enemy of tremendous power.

The first ally of Satan is the beast from the sea. ***(1) And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.*** This beast came from the sea which symbolized ungodly governments. In John's day the Romans had access to Asia Minor and the seven churches of Asia only by the sea. The description of his appearance was like that found in Daniel 7 which was also symbolic of worldly governments. John sees a fierce beast coming up out of the water. ***(2) And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.***

Notice that the dragon (Satan 12:9) gave him his power. ***(4) And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?***

In v7 the beast is said to "*make war with the saints,*" It is clear that Satan brings up the beast as his agent to persecute Christians. So the first mark of identity is that the beast is a major persecutor of Christians.

As this beast comes into view, he is seen in v1 as having ten horns spread on seven heads and on each horn is a crown. Now V2 tells us that his body is like a leopard, his mouth like a lion, and his paws like a bear. So, we see that he is made of parts from three animals—a lion, a bear, and a leopard - plus he has ten horns. Such a description will remind those who know the Old Testament of the prophecy in Daniel 7 where there are four beasts - a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a beast with ten horns.

Surely the people of Asia would make some connection between the two. In Daniel's prophecy, the four animals each represent a major world empire: the lion is Babylon, the bear depicts the Medes and Persians; the leopard stands for the fast moving Grecian Empire of Alexander the Great; and the fourth, with the ten horns, represents the Roman Empire and ten kings.

So the first two clues would suggest that this beast from the sea is the Roman Empire which persecuted Christians. But do the other clues about this beast in Revelation agree with that conclusion? In vs 6-7 we get more important clues. **(6) *And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. (7) And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.*** Here the beast is given four qualities: (1) he blasphemes God; (2) he makes war on the saints; (3) he reigns over every tribe, people, language and nation, and (4) the inhabitants of the earth worship the beast.

Se we conclude that the beast of the sea is the Roman Government

Living under the oppression of such governments was a terrible burden for our first century brethren. But it was a burden they could bear. They needed dedication and conviction to assure them of the ultimate victory.

Second beast. The dragon (Satan) also brings up a second beast in Revelation 13. The only description of this beast is that he has two horns like a lamb. This beast arose from the earth and symbolized false, ungodly religion. The description of this beast revealed how deceptive its purposes were **(11) *And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.*** It appeared as a lamb but in reality it was speaking as the dragon.

John's readers would recognize this beast. He arises with the first beast (the Roman Empire) so this beast exists concurrently with the first beast-they come up together and fall together. This second beast is also said (v12) to exercise his authority or power "*in the sight*" of the first beast. **(12) *And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*** This precludes identifying the second beast as something that continues *after* the first beast is gone for the two exist and work together.

In addition, (v11) the second *beast speaks as a dragon* and, thus, is the tool or spokesman of Satan. The second beast is presented as having only one mission (v12) – i.e. to force people to worship the first beast. To do this, he deceives with false miracles, uses economic pressure, and even kills those who refuse to worship the beast. (vs 13-18)

The following characteristics describe the false religion of "Emperor Worship," Sometimes call Emperor Cult. It exercised authority of the first beast. It enforced worship of the first beast's image. Because of its close cooperation with the dragon, the second beast was able to deceive those on earth (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12). Those who believed in the second beast were deluded and persuaded to do two things for the beast. *First*, they became the instrument by which godly saints were persecuted (13:15b). **(15) And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.** *Second*, they were willing to be marked as the followers of the dragon. **(16) And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:**

This mark of the beast was placed upon their foreheads and right hands. These two phrases symbolized the **thinking** (forehead) and **acting** (hands) capabilities of man. Thus, the mark in some way makes reference to thoughts and deeds which identified one as a willing follower of the dragon (Satan).

The Number 666?

Now, what about the mark of the beast, the number 666? In the Bible, a "mark" is used for identification. The interpretations of the mark of the beast are numerous. They range from the barcodes on merchandise in the retail stores to the electronic zip code number on your envelopes to the social security number. Some people refuse to have a credit card or a social security number containing three sixes for fear it is the mark of the beast.

Some speak of the antichrist as a person representing all that is evil and speak of the "mark of the beast" in Revelation 13:16-18 as followers of the antichrist. Many interpret the figurative language of the book of Revelation literally and foresee a literal 666 mark placed on the foreheads.

Some have said that the number 666 points to Nero Caesar because of his ruthless behavior toward Christians. Other interpreters reference the apostasy of Roman Catholic

Church with the pope being the antichrist. Still others think it is some Middle East political figure. Contrary to what you may have heard, the riddle of 666 does not have anything to do with the postal bar code, scanning marks on products, or popular personalities like the pope, Hitler, or Saddam Hussein, or the President.

It's important to keep in mind as we consider the verses in Revelation to whom and for what purpose the book was written and the timeframe. Revelation 1:1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:* These verses teach us that the book was written to servants, i.e. Christians about things that were to happen shortly. Trying to make things apply to events 2000 years later would have little meaning/comfort to the people to whom the book was written. *. Revelation 13:17-18 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (18) Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.* The text in vs 17-18 seems to describe a person. In fact v 18 says: **for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.** Notice that the number identifies the beast as a man and v 18 tells us that his number is 666. This number would have to identify someone that those in the 1st century could relate. It would also have to be someone that would influence buying/selling. If the number identifies the name of the beast and the beast is the kings of the Roman government, then the conclusion is that the number 666 identifies the emperors of Rome. I conclude that the person that best fits those clues is the Emperor Domitian. Some historians, although not all, claim that he was wicked and placed tremendous hardships on Christians, especially to those that did not revere him as God. He erected images of himself and insisted the people bow down and worship him.

Ethelbert Stauffer was a German Protestant theologian who held that gematria could be used to explain the Biblical number 666 to the coins with the abbreviated inscriptions for Domitian. Gematria is the assigning of number values to the alphabet.

Stauffer also said, *“The cruelty and executions during his reign of terror were so odious that he earned the nickname “the Beast” amongst Romans, Greeks, Christians and Jews.”* During the 1st century following Nero, the titles of Domitian were abbreviated in various ways on different Greek coins. The numbers for Domitian were assigned to coins

of money. Coins with the gematria of Domitian satisfy the scriptural reference that no one would be able to buy or sell without the name of the beast or the number of his name. During his reign, coins bearing Domitian's image and titles would be in the hand of every man in the marketplaces that was willing to bow down and worship him. Nothing could be bought/sold without the use of these coins, thus satisfying 13:17

Once again the historical backdrop helps us understand the imagery in 13:16-17. When one participated in Emperor Worship he received a token or certificate signifying that he had performed the action (this was the mark). Having this certificate the man could then buy and sell. Thus the need to have the mark of the beast i.e. certification from the Roman government.

Domitian reinstated the idea of Emperor Worship. Those that would bow down and worship him were issued a certificate (or coin) showing that their homage had been paid and they were allowed to buy and sale, work in the public, live in the cities, etc. Those that refused, i.e. the faithful Christian, were subject to capital punishment. This practiced continued until 313 and the Edict of Milan, which freed Christians. Up until this time, many Christians lost their lives.

Let me suggest that the right hand and forehead are figurative and symbolizes the wiliness to submit to the beast in both mind and intellect. The right hand symbolizes actions and deeds while the forehead symbolized thought and mindset.

So this beast exists concurrently with the first beast-they come up together and fall together. This second beast is also said to exercise his authority or power "*in the sight*" of the first beast. This precludes identifying the second beast as something that continues *after* the first beast is gone for the two exist and work together.

So, how would early Christians have identified this second beast whose sole purpose is to force people to worship the emperors of the Roman Empire? To the first century mind, this picture would have been clear. Beginning particularly during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, 81/96 AD; emperor worship became a major force in Roman life. A strong cult of emperor worship developed; they built images and even erected large, elaborate temples to the Roman Emperors where they were to be worshipped. People were required to take a pinch of incense and burn it on the altar to an emperor and confess "*Caesar is Lord.*" Refusing to take this pledge was considered an act of treason. So when Christians refused to participate in this worship to emperors, they became the enemies of the state and this, in turn, became the basis of intense persecution. To those in the area of

the seven churches of Asia, to whom Revelation was originally addressed, there would have been no difficulty in knowing who this second beast was: The **Cult of Emperor Worship**. In Ephesus, for example, right next to the major downtown market area, there was a huge temple to three Roman Emperors: Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. So the dragon is Satan, the first beast is the Roman Empire and the second beast is the Cult of Emperor Worship.

Thus in chapter 13 we are given a vivid description of two great allies of Satan. John has seen that Satan used ungodly governments (the first beast) and religious error or false religions (the second beast) to destroy the faith of Christians.

Invitation