

# The Mark of the Beast

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you've got your Bibles, keep it up in Revelation 13. What an interesting passage. What an interesting passage. Well, Namibia.

Everyone know where it is? Yeah, where is it? Point it out? If you had to point to where Namibia is, where would it be? Okay.

Everyone take a guess. Just let me see all the hands. Even if you don't know where it is, just take a wild guess where you think Namibia is. This side is going that way, and this side is going that way. What do we know about Namibia? Yeah, well, that's east, that's west. Namibia is more or less that way, just so that you see.

More or less that way. It's not that way. That's Antarctica. Namibia, Fintuk. It's a god of desert, right? You with me. So, what do we know about Namibia? Does anyone know anything about Namibian politics?

[ 1 : 08 ] Not much. Who's the prime minister? How many people live there? What's its military capability? Reserve and Navy, it's got a submarine.

What's going on there? What's their GDP? Yeah. No, don't blame me for not knowing. We don't know because nothing's really happening between South Africa and Namibia. But that would change very quickly if Namibia got uppity about, let's say, fishing rights or the diamonds that are mined on its border.

The Orange River spews out just south of Namibia. Let's say they're a little bit like England back in the day. Oh, you've got diamonds. We'll take those. And they declared war on South Africa. My guess is that we would all suddenly be very interested as to who the prime minister is, exactly where it is, and what the military capabilities are of that country.

You get me? So, while we're at peace, it's okay. We don't need to know too much about it. But the moment someone's coming in to attack us or declare war on us, as a country, you would have newspaper articles.

There would be online content. There would be news flashes. We would very quickly get to know who the president is and what their military capabilities are. We would need to know them because they're our enemy.

[ 2 : 27 ] You with me? So, it means while we're at war with someone, we need to know who the enemy is. You've got to get to know as much about them as you can. It's just a basic fact of warfare.

And in today's passage in Revelation, we're given inside intelligence into man's oldest and most violent enemy, Satan.

And we are told what to do while we are in the middle of that battle. Are you with me? So, we're going to uncover all those weird and wonderful images and we'll see basically that it uncovers who our greatest enemy is, what he's got against us, how he fights against us, and how we're to fight back.

If we orientate ourselves in Revelation again, we were lost in Revelation 12. And we saw that this world is caught up in this huge cosmic battle between God and Satan.

And Satan loses that battle, gets hurled down to earth, but he then continues that battle against God's people. So, if you've got your Bible, it says that last verse in Revelation 12.

[ 3 : 32 ] Then the dragon was enraged of the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring, those who obey God's commands and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Okay, and that's us. And then our passage starts with the dragon stood on the shore of the sea and he calls up this weird and crazy and scary looking beast from the sea.

All right. So, that tells us where we are in Revelation, that chapter 13 is all about the war that Satan is going to wage against God's people. And that this battle is going to take place on planet Earth.

And that we, us sitting here at St. Mark's, on Sunday, in the middle of Plumstead, are participants in that battle. Essentially, this is a call to arms for us to get involved in the warfare that's happening around us.

And it's showing us that there actually is warfare. We need to see with the eyes of Revelation, with the eyes of Apocalypse. We need to see beyond what we're looking at into the kind of the world beyond. But strangely enough, the world beyond is happening in the world in front of us.

[ 4 : 38 ] So, it's that double vision we need to start looking at. So, we need to look at these beasts to find out who they are and what they're doing and then what our response is going to be as God's people.

So, first of all, we've got these crazy beasts. How do we decode them? What do they mean? I mean, this beast with seven heads and ten horns. It's got a fatal wound.

It comes back to life. It wages war. It's around for 42 months. How do we make sense of all of this? Well, remember what our decoding device is.

We've had it now the whole way through Revelation. If I ask you, what is the decoder that we use to understand the images in Revelation? Revelation. What answer am I going to get? By now, we should know. Okay.

It's the Old Testament. Very important. We don't decode Revelation from the world around us. We use the decoder that God has given us, the Old Testament. By the way, that's true for the whole New Testament.

[ 5 : 35 ] You use the Old Testament to understand the New Testament better. Okay. And so, if we use the Old Testament decoder, the main book that we've gone to again and again and again, we did it in our reading, but in a separate passage, is the book of Daniel.

Okay. Kind of the first apocalyptic book in the Old Testament. In Daniel chapter 7, we come across these beasts that are described for us here in Revelation 13. There's four of them.

We've spent time in Daniel chapter 7 before. And what's happening in Revelation 13 is that it's a kind of a conglomeration of those four different beasts in Daniel chapter 7.

In Daniel chapter 7, there's four beasts. First, there's a leopard. There's a bear. There's an eagle. And then there's a fourth beast that is more scary than all of them. It's so beastly that it moves sort of beyond looking like an actual beast, like an animal.

But we know what those beasts in Daniel chapter 7 are. Daniel tells us, and it's unanimous through our church history by now, that we know what those beasts are.

[ 6 : 44 ] There's a prophetic vision given to Daniel to explain that kingdoms are going to arise that are going to fight against God's people, but they are being sent by God to do certain things. So the first beast is the kingdom of Babylon, the one that Daniel was living in, specifically Nebuchadnezzar.

The next one was the kingdom of Persia that overtook the Babylonians while the Jews were still there. Then there'd be this kingdom of Greece, specifically Alexander the Great in about 300 AD, which is about 200 years after Daniel is writing.

That's how far God was looking into the future when he told Daniel. And the kingdom of Greece would be overtaken by the kingdom of Rome. And that last one is specifically nasty.

And it seems that John is rolling them all up into this fourth beast. He's simply saying that the fourth beast, Rome, is the epitome of ungodly kingdoms. And it'll show us what ungodly kingdoms look and act like that are controlled by Satan.

Okay? Are you with me so far? Why beastly? What is the point of showing these kingdoms as beasts, as animals? Well, because they act like animals, these kings.

[ 7 : 54 ] They come to power. They create these empires that move beyond their borders. And they literally chop their way through neighboring kingdoms and through neighboring cities and neighboring villages and neighboring homes.

You see, we mustn't think that the ancient warfare is like modern warfare, where they thought, oh, we better not kill little children and women. That's a modern thing. And by the way, that's based on Christianity. The rules of warfare, strange as they may sound, like you're not allowed to use mustard gas, but you can use bullets.

It's actually Christian principles that I'd play there. But in the ancient world, there was nothing like that. And these kingdoms would leave in their wake, as they moved across the nations, a trail of death and rape and theft and slavery.

And they're beastly because they're very antithesis, the opposite of the kind of kingdom that God wants on earth. The opposite, in fact, of the kingdom that Jesus was going to establish, right? Love and forgiveness and justice and mercy. The kind of kingdom that he wants us to be establishing wherever we are.

[ 9 : 02 ] And this beast in Revelation 13 is no different. So it's really uncovering the beast that John's listeners would have been faced with, which is the beast of Rome.

And you can see what it looks like in this first section. So this first section is all about this sea beast. And it's essentially, this beast claims divine authority, essentially setting himself up as a parody of the God of the universe.

And he uses coercion and threats and essentially capital punishment. The threat of death, of fines, of imprisonment, of anything it can do to force people into submission to it.

Okay, so you read that first section. It's full of how great this beast is and what it's going to do and how it's going to force people into its kingdom. In this historical context, this fits Rome with its persecution of the church and its imperial worship, its claims to almost divine authority over the whole world.

Just to give you a taste of what Rome did under Nero, for example, and we'll come across Nero probably a little bit later in this passage. Nero was the first emperor who started persecuting the Christians.

[ 10 : 23 ] In the book of Acts, you've got persecution, but that's local persecution. This is the first emperor that said, you know what, we need to get rid of these guys. And he started it to cover his tracks for starting a fire in Rome in AD 64.

And this is attested to in historical literature. So you've got Roman historians that tell you how bad Nero is and what he did to the Christians. For example, he rounded them up and he sewed them into animal skins and then fed them to wild dogs.

Then he would host his evening parties and have them lit up by Christians, covered in wax, stuck on poles and set alight. Yes. And this went on for another 300 years.

Now, the persecutions in the time of Rome didn't go on constantly for 300 years, but fairly regularly, if you were a Christian in the Roman Empire, you would come across this kind of thing.

But this beast in Revelation will operate in all ages. It's not just at the time of John. Because we've seen that it arises after Daniel.

[ 11 : 27 ] It arises here in the New Testament times. And in the story of Revelation, it's only overthrown when Christ returns in chapter 19, which is a long, long, long view of history.

And so in our perspective, it's still future. And so the beast, this beast of Revelation 13, is actually still operating in our day. And it forces us, the church, to look at the world around us.

This passage forces us to look at the world around us and make judgments on the political powers and cultural forces of our day and discern what manner of beast is at work.

And we find it in any totalitarian system. A totalitarian system, as you know, would be someone who sets themselves up with all power. It stands in opposition to God and his work of saving the world in Christ.

And it's finding any type of salvation, including political salvation, outside of Christ. So the first beast we come across is a political power that's at work in the world, guided, controlled by the dragon, by Satan.

[ 12 : 37 ] That brings us to the second beast, the one from the land. And that's found in the next section from verse 11. And we'll see that this land beast is a mouthpiece for the sea beast.

They're kind of in cahoots. It kind of works as a false prophet, calling people not to worship God, but to worship the sea beast and the dragon. In other words, political forces.

And perhaps unknowingly for people that he lies to, Satan. And these beasts and dragons kind of act as an unholy trinity to enslave the world and to hurt Christians.

And this second beast has his great pomp and boasts as well. It creates an image. It creates an idol. It creates a statue of the political beast and says, hey guys, we need to worship this.

Now, in the Roman times, when John wrote this, everyone would understand what he's talking about. Not every city, but very often, as you did business in the Roman Empire, you would have to sacrifice to the Roman emperor.

[ 13 : 49 ] You'd perform something to his genius, which is not to him directly, but to the spirit, to the mind, to the idea of this imperial emperor who claimed to be God. And the only people who stood

up against that were the Christians and said, no, we're not doing that.

So I'll have a look at verse, let's see, verse 15. This beast was given power, this is the land beast, was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, the sea beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark. And we'll get into that in just a second. And so both the sea beast and the land beast are only speaking what comes from the dragon.

It's an image based on lies, because he knows the beast has actually been defeated and wounded. So all the way through this passage, this beast has received a wound, and it kind of heals, and then the beast is like, no, look at that wound, don't worry about the wound, I'm big, I'm strong, you don't have to, I'm the one you must worry about.

So it comes across as big and scary, but in actual fact it's been wounded and defeated. Just like Satan has been thrown down from heaven to earth, and he's trying to pretend to the people on earth that he's still the one power in heaven.

[15:18] And John here is saying, no, you need to realize that they're not the only power in the universe. They're going to claim to be, but we must realize that they're not. They're actually defeated already. But they will make themselves sound big and strong and invincible, or good and steady and dependable, trusting in it, doing what he wants us to do, what it says.

Because if you don't, it's going to kill you. And so what this idol does is it speaks hatred, and it causes non-compliant worshippers, in other words, Christians, to be slain.

And then it's given this mark, and it's a famous passage in Revelation, and the one part I didn't want to preach on, but there you go, you've got to do it when it's there. And this beast wants everyone to know who belongs to him.

I've got a mark, I've put it on people, and you can only do stuff if I know who you are, if you belong to me. So this mark is a mark of ownership. And it's there to create division and factionalism.

Because those who don't have the mark are to be uncovered and persecuted. Everyone wants to know what on earth is going on here. What is this mark, and who has it? Is it going to be a microchip in our skins?

[16:34] Is it a barcode when we use our credit cards? Okay. But we need to use, remember the decoder we're supposed to use? We don't use the things around us, we've got to use the Old Testament.

And so we know that the Jews were to mark themselves on the forehead and on the hands with the Shema. Back in Deuteronomy and Exodus. Their version of the creed, it's their mark of freedom.

They received it after they'd been freed from slavery in Exodus, from the Egyptians. We have come across this mark in Revelation. Those who have received the mark of the Lamb.

And so whatever else we know, this mark is not something that you see. It's not an actual mark, it's a symbolic mark. It's telling you that you belong to someone. And second, we know that because of the numbers in Revelation, seven is the number of completeness.

One less completeness. One less than seven is going to be incomplete. And completeness here means working according to God's plan. To God's will.

[17:37] Six, then, is working against God and against his plan for the world. Now, interestingly, a version of the 666. 666 actually occurs in the Old Testament, by the way. Solomon, in 1 Kings chapter 10, Solomon receives 666 talents of gold every year.

Which sounds okay, except in the next chapter, that wealth and riches entraps him to getting all these concubines and women. And then he scives off and follows their gods.

But a version of this 666 occurs in our passage from Daniel chapter 3, the dimensions of Nebuchadnezzar's statue. Some Bibles translate it, but he was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide.

Isn't that interesting? Now, it's not 666, but it goes to show how this number works. And there's this toxic mixture of pride with Nebuchadnezzar. Pride and wealth and idolatry.

And this toxic mixture will pop up again in the Roman Empire. When the empress decided it was a good idea to be referred to as gods. Now, many have calculated this number to refer to Nero.

[18:45] Who started the first politically led persecutions of Christians in the Roman world. And I've got a table to show you how they calculated that, just so that you know. That should pop up in a second.

But essentially what they would do in that time is something called gematria, which is the study or the use of letters to calculate numbers. And you'll see that John actually says, I want you to calculate this number.

You need to look at it and calculate it. And if you take the word beast in Greek, that's therion. You would transliterate that into Hebrew. And then you would take the Hebrew letters, break them down. And when you add them up, you get number 666. You could also do the same thing with Nero's name. Caesar Nero. Nero Caesar. That would be translated into Greek as Neron Kaiser.

Then into Hebrew. And then that would add up to 666. But what is this beast doing, the second land beast doing? And essentially what he's doing is he's a propaganda machine for the political beast. [ 19 : 51 ] His job is to make big, blustery claims about the beast, try to dazzle everyone with magic. And he really operates like a con artist. All the time spinning lies, deceiving people, and making the sea beast sound bigger and better than he is.

You've got to remember which beast we're talking about here. Here the goal of the signs of... He acts kind of like a false prophet. Instead of pointing people to God, he's pointing people to something on earth and saying, hey, you need to worship that.

Here the goal of the signs of the false prophet and the land beast is to deceive people into thinking the sea beast is here for their good, when actually it's not. His goal is to hide the nature of what the sea beast is, pretending it's strong when in fact it's weak, pretending it's unconquerable when in fact it's already been conquered.

And images have always been the stock and trade of those who claim to be in power. In every age, those who exercise totalitarian power want to impress their subjects and other nations with the power and the sophistication of their technological achievements.

For politicians, image is often everything. All right, so you've got these two beasts. You've got the dragon. Where does that leave us? Where does that leave God's people?

[ 21 : 08 ] Well, they're slap bang in the middle of these two beasts and slap bang in the middle of our passage. So let's have a look at verse 8 to verse 10. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast, all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with a sword, with a sword he will be killed. And this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

So, what are God's people to do in the middle of this crazy war that's going on? And we're caught up in it. The beast wants to rule over the world, but he wants to make sure that we get hurt in the process.

How are we to fight back? What are our weapons? We know that Jesus doesn't want us to fight with human weapons, with swords. But he does want us to fight.

Just remember that Christ's kingdom works opposite to the way that we think. And the first thing, well, basically what God wants his people to be, is to have his faithful and wise endurance.

[ 22 : 24 ] Faithful and wise endurance. Firstly, we are called to be faithful to Christ. Now, this means both faithfulness and trust. Depending on the translation, sometimes it says be faithful to Christ.

At the end of verse 10, sometimes it says to trust. But they mean the same thing. Faithful here means not giving up on staying loyal to Jesus when we don't fully understand what is going on, but especially when we don't think the outcome is going to be good for us here and now.

When we've got the sword hanging over us and the threats get louder and more urgent and more deadly. When the going gets tough, we need to get faithful.

This calls us to trust in God and in Christ, knowing that he knows better than us what his grand plan of the world is. We are called to play our part, trusting that Jesus knows what he is doing.

Faithfulness and trust go hand in hand. And our trust is helped by knowing that all of this is happening because of something that was set in the very foundations of creation. Have a look at verse 8 again.

[ 23 : 32 ] All the inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast, all whose names have not been written in the book of life, belonging to the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world or from the foundation of the world.

The foundation here is something that is cast according to a blueprint. There's an original design. Whatever comes on top of it is based on what has been laid down.

The foundation plan is original. And the course of history will flow according to God's plan, even though these beasts will make you think that they are the ones calling the shots.

The dragon and the beasts are merely usurpers, claiming to be the ones in control, but they're actually not. And like nearly every violent revolution in history, they will never fully succeed. The world is created by order and not chaos.

Order presupposes hierarchy and authority. God will always win. The devil will always lose. So firstly, we stay faithful to Christ no matter what we see in front of us.

[ 24 : 34 ] And that could potentially lead to our deaths, as it says in verse 10. Secondly, though, we are to be wise in how we discern what is happening around us.

And we see this best in how Christians think of the number of the beast. And so you might see some of the more recent and kind of what I call foolish examples.

So Monster Energy Drink, I don't know if you got this in your WhatsApp feed or online. Some lady thought that the letters looked like the Hebrew letters and it went viral.

Apparently Google is in on the action as well. But then again, so is Adobe Acrobat Reader. Let's go to the next slide. And Walt Disney. Because there's the 666.

Now, this is not how we see Satan at work in these places. If he is, it's in a much more subtle way. So it's not in the things that you see. It's behind. It's what they say.

[ 25 : 35 ] What they stand for. And what they want us to do. For example, Google is one of the main propaganda machines of today. And that's not to say it's bad. It just means it's ubiquitous. Everyone uses Google.

It's the biggest search engine. In fact, it is hugely powerful. And it actually is beginning to skew itself more and more away from Christian principles. And it tends to censor Christian conservative content.

Amazon, the online book publisher, is pulling more and more Christian content, especially in the area of counseling for sexual addictions and sexual disorders. Many Christian conservative commentators are being banned from Facebook and Twitter.

I've been banned from a few sites on Facebook. The problem with Disney is not that it looks like it's got sixes in its name. But did you know that it hosts pride parades at Disney World for the kids? And that their next movies, all their next movies are going to have a content with someone that is either transgender or pushing their LGBT agenda.

[ 26 : 43 ] On to movies that are aimed at children. So that's where the problem is with these things. Not in just what the images look like. It's not looking for actual numbers, but the spirit of the beast of the land, the thing that stands behind it.

And the propaganda and what it says and what it stands for. And indoctrinating messages that are being said and what is accepted as truth. And people will accept whatever is repeated the most. Just think about what is being said about sexuality and gender in our day. And the Western world speaks with one voice in this regard. So, how do we fight that? Well, we fight it with the truth. For some of us, that means not getting our theology from silly little memes that we send on WhatsApp. And stop sharing them if you do. So don't send those things on. Can I ask you not to do that? If you need to think about it, then send it to someone, to a Christian who knows what he's a little bit older. And say, hey, what do you think of this? Instead of saying, oh, look at this. This is the mark of the beast here. But maybe it means for us, it might mean looking for some good Christian content online.

[ 27 : 53 ] To counter the false propaganda that we see in the world around us. We need to fill our heads with knowledge and truth. It's time we Christians started imbibing and creating content that explicitly counters the false claims of propaganda that we see in the world around us.

And we've gotten lazy in our thinking. And it's time for us to wake up and smell the coffee and listen to truth and then spread the truth. In the place where everyone is talking, which is mostly online. But obviously with our friends and family as well.

Okay, so we need to be wise in how we look at the world around us. And then lastly, we need to endure, to bear up under the things that are trying to push us down. In this passage, we are called to take it, even if it means our death.

To bear up under pressure, not to buckle. Now that's a hard truth. That's a hard truth. And we're not quite called yet to sacrifice our lives. But you never know.

Standing fast for Christ and for biblical truth is very important for us in our time. We're not yet living under full-blown dictatorship. But we may well get there faster than we think.

[ 29 : 01 ] It's happened before. Not so much in the West. But the West is very fast abandoning in its Christian heritage. And so you'll see a massive swing. And we've seen it in our own day. A massive swing away from basic Christian ideas and culture to something that's very not Christian.

And forcing more and more people to accept the non-Christian version. Well, remember how God's people stood up under Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3.

Regardless of the cost and with no guarantee that God would save them from the threat of fiery death in front of them. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not defend ourselves before you in this matter.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it. And he will deliver us from your majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, your majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

Now that is courage. We are to realize we're in a battle and to be brave soldiers for Christ. We're not to show cowardice in the face of the enemy. We have to battle for the gospel no matter what the personal cost.

[ 30 : 15 ] And we know that that cost is tempered with the knowledge that our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And as we saw at Easter, Christ's death and resurrection purchased for us all we need. An inheritance that can't be spoiled.

All will never fade and cannot be taken from us. Our future is totally secure. We have nothing to fear from any foe in this life. No matter what evil political forces are laid against us, even if they cut us down, we will still win.

And that's exactly how the early church thought about persecution and martyrdom. You may know this quote from Tertullian. And he was in the middle of it. Kill us. Torture us.

Condemn us. Grind us to dust. Your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. Nor does your cruelty, however exquisite a value, is rather a temptation to us.

The more we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow. Blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. Well, let's pray to God to ask him to help us to stand firm no matter what comes our way.

[ 31 : 19 ] Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for this powerful word of unmasking the powers of this world. Help us, Lord, to see with wisdom and understanding and to fight back with truth and with our lives if necessary.

Lord, this takes special power from you for us to stand strong together, united in fellowship around your word and with each other in opposition to all evil powers that come our way.

Lord, if we are called to do that in our lives or in the lives of our children, help us to stand strong and firm on your truth, never swaying for a moment knowing that our names are written in your book and that our future is eternally secure.

In Jesus' name. Amen.