

REPENTING OF THE MARK AND THE IMAGE

CHALLENGING A WIDELY HELD BELIEF

Preface

Among those who have some knowledge of biblical prophecy, it is a commonly held view that anyone who takes the mark of the beast has sealed their fate; that they have committed an unforgivable sin and are, at that point, beyond repentance. The Bible does not teach this "sealed fate" notion; in fact, such a notion contradicts what Jesus taught about forgiveness. While it is true that receiving the mark, and worshiping the image is a sin, it will be forgiven if repented of, as would any other idolatry.

Receiving the mark and worshiping the image occur at such a defining time in history and carry such dire consequences that people have embellished what the scriptures say about it in much the same way that God's prohibition concerning the forbidden fruit was. We don't know if it was Adam or Eve who added "or touch it" to the prohibition God gave concerning the forbidden fruit but it was undoubtedly meant to be a safeguard measure. If you don't touch the fruit, you can't eat it.

In the same way, I expect that the "sealed fate" notion is an attempted safeguard that comes from the overstating of consequences. Going beyond what scripture states is never a good idea and in this case, it's likely to be counter-productive. Not only will it be an ineffective deterrent when people are deceived, but it may also cause some to think that they can't repent when they actually can, causing them to double-down on a bad decision when they would have otherwise repented.

This booklet is for those who are willing to honestly examine what the scriptures say about the subject. It covers what the mark and the image are along with the context as to when they come into play and why the sin of receiving the mark and image worship is forgivable.

The Mark and the Image

The mark and the image are always mentioned together. They are first mentioned in Revelation 13 and every subsequent mention of them refers to both the mark and the image, never one without the other. This would indicate that they are inseparably related and connected to each other in some way, being seen essentially as two aspects of the same thing. Isolating "receiving the mark" and claiming that it by itself seals one's fate is dishonest because it ignores the "worshiping the image" aspect and makes a separation between the mark and the image that the Bible never makes.

The Evil Trio

Before we get into looking at the mark and the image, we need to understand for discernment purposes who it is that gives the mark and who exactly is the image a likeness of. Revelation identifies an "evil trio" who work together to bring the man of sin into a position of exercising dominion over the nations. This trio is identified as the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs.

Revelation 16:13

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10

Of these three, only one is a human, the false prophet. The dragon and the beast are evil angels. The dragon is identified in Revelation 12 as the devil, or Satan, the leader of the evil angels. The beast is pictured in Revelation 13 as having seven heads and ten horns and comes up out of the sea, or as Revelation 17 states, he comes up out of the abyss. We know he is an evil angel because the abyss is only used in the context of evil spirit beings, never humans. His role is similar to that of the evil angels mentioned in Daniel 10, namely the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece, which is to bring about a kingdom that is hostile toward Israel.

The only human, the false prophet, is pictured in Revelation 13 as a beast coming up out of the earth with two horns and speaking like a dragon. He is also referred to as the man of sin or the Antichrist among other titles. He is the one who deceives the world by the signs and wonders he performs. Because he speaks like a dragon, and Satan is identified as a dragon, it's reasonable to assume that the false prophet is someone who Satan enters, much like when he entered Judas, the son of perdition.

The Mark

The mark that is to be avoided is something that is specific to the false prophet. It is either his name or the number of his name. It is received either on the right hand or forehead and is required in order to buy or sell anything.

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six. Revelation 13:16-18

When someone accepts the false prophet's mark, they gain access to the commercial system that he has control over and are subsequently able to buy and sell things. While receiving the mark is generally thought of as a one-time event, it entitles the recipient to subsequently engage in buying and selling. This continual receiving of the benefits that the mark affords is an important concept to understand since it is those who persist in making use of it are the ones affected by the plagues.

The Image

The image that people must worship is a likeness of the beast that comes up out of the abyss. In order to understand what the image is, you have to understand who the beast is. The beast is an evil angel whose ultimate goal is to cause the false prophet to exercise dominion or authority over the earth. An image or likeness of that beast would also serve to promote the false prophet's dominion. The following passage describes the false prophet and his call to make the image.

And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. Revelation 13:14-15

The deceived people of the world are the ones who collaborate on the making of the image. The false prophet gives the image life. The image identifies those who don't worship it so they might be killed. Based on these characteristics, the image of the beast is a code of conduct that the deceived people of the world put together, which affirms the false prophet's sovereignty. He gives this code of conduct life by making it law and those who don't comply with what it requires are put to death. His mark is an integral part of the image and is used to "speak" and identify those who refuse to obey its mandates. Either conform to the code of conduct or risk death.

Context of the Mark and Image

It's helpful to understand the circumstances under which the mark and the image become a mandatory part of the false prophet's rule. It will be a time unlike any other time the world has ever known. All of the deception of wickedness will be on display including supernatural signs and wonders being performed.

When the ten leaders destroy the world's capital, the world quickly descends into a time of war. Nation will rise against nation causing famine and pestilence to abound. Many will despair and think the end has come. The agenda of the ten leaders will be subverted by the false prophet and three of the ten will come against him with an overwhelming force, but little do they know that they are walking into a trap. The false prophet, in conjunction with the evil angel beast, commands the supernatural in a way that causes fire to come down from heaven and destroy his attackers. This display of power makes him the undisputed leader of the world. Wars cease and order is restored. The false prophet is hailed as a savior and seizes the moment by declaring himself to be God.

It is against this backdrop that the mark and the image emerge. Unless someone has a general understanding of prophecy, they'll be hard pressed to dispute the false prophet's claim of deity. Even though he will be the epitome of evil, he will not be perceived as such by the vast majority of the world. Most will believe his lies because of the signs and wonders he performs. They will accept his mark and comply with the image, thereby giving Satan the worship he lusts for.

This is why it's important for believers to be prepared to discern the things that Jesus told us ahead of time concerning His return. There will be so much deception and confusion in those days that if we have allowed the things of this world to lull us into a spiritual sleep then we run the risk of being caught off guard when it comes time to make life and death decisions.

For a period of time after the false prophet claims to be God, people are deciding whether or not to accept his mark and worship the image. After people have made their decision, God judges those who sided with the false prophet to be in error and begins a series of plagues as proof. The plagues demonstrate God's sovereignty over His creation in contrast to the false prophet's impotence to do anything about them. They directly challenge the false prophet's claim to deity. The plagues are God's last call to forsake the false prophet before Jesus returns to destroy the kingdom of darkness.

Consistent with Repentance

While the Bible never states specifically that people repent during the plagues, there are reasons to believe that some will. There are times when inferences can be made about a subject by looking at scriptures that are consistent with it being true. The following sections contain several reasons that are consistent with people being able to repent of receiving the mark and worshiping the image.

Idolatry is Forgivable

This is the single most convincing argument against the “sealed fate” notion held by many. Receiving the mark of the false prophet and worshiping the image is committing the sin of idolatry. It is worshiping someone or something other than God. According to Jesus, this sin is forgivable.

Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Matthew 12:31

The only unforgivable sin is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which is the sin of having a hardened heart that persists in rejecting His conviction. It is unforgivable because repentance and forgiveness result from being convicted of sin. If a person rejects the Spirit's conviction they close the door on repentance and forgiveness. A heart in this condition is unforgivable. This will manifest itself as blasphemy because, as Jesus taught, the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart.

For those seeking the truth, the fact that idolatry is a forgivable sin if repented of should be sufficient to dispel the notion that accepting the mark seals one's fate and somehow makes them unforgivable. Whether those people who were deceived into accepting the mark and worshiping the image actually do repent of their idolatry or not is something that the seven plagues will reveal.

The Heart of God

It is widely agreed upon that the seven plagues are God's judgment of those who are receiving of the mark and are worshiping the image. Those who believe that accepting the mark actually seals one's fate can only view these plagues as God's torturing of people who are beyond repentance, something that is completely out of character for God.

“Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?” Ezekiel 18:23

Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.’ Ezekiel 33:11a

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9

What makes more sense is that the seven plagues serve the purpose of convicting the deceived people of their sin and compelling them to repent and forsake the false prophet. Now *that* is in keeping with the character of God.

“I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered.” Joel 2:30-32a

This passage corresponds to the opening of the sixth seal, a time when everyone has made the decision as to whether they are going to worship the false prophet or not. What follows is the seventh seal, which contains the seven plagues. So, that passage is essentially stating that whoever calls on the name of the Lord during the plagues will be delivered, something that would be impossible if their fate was sealed.

The Seven Plagues

The way that the plagues are unfolded is consistent with the idea that they are meant to call people to repentance. The first four plagues start off as a fraction of what they will become. This “phased in” approach is consistent with corrective discipline. Those who need little convincing to realize they made a mistake will repent earlier.

As the plagues progress, their effects become increasingly adverse and affect those who persist in receiving of the mark and worshiping the image. People will respond to the conviction of the plagues by either repenting or hardening their hearts. Eventually, it will get to the point when people cease to repent but that doesn't happen until very late in the progression of the plagues.

The Mention of No Repentance

The seven plagues occur in sequence and it is not until the end of the fourth plague that it is first said that people did not repent. It is also stated at the end of the fifth and sixth plagues that people did not repent. The fact that the first mention of no repentance is noted at a specific time in the progression of the plagues suggests that repentance was taking place up until that point. Otherwise, why make that statement at that particular point?

Why even mention repentance at all unless it was something that was expected to occur, a desired outcome? If those who take the mark are beyond repentance then why make the point to say at the end of the fourth plague that people didn't repent? That just doesn't make sense.

The Presence of the 144,000

While the activities of the 144,000 aren't specifically revealed, the timing of their sealing and the protection afforded them suggests that will be doing whatever it is they do during the plagues. We first hear of the 144,000 after the great tribulation is brought to an end and the sixth seal is opened.

And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 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." And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel. Revelation 7:2-4

This is just before the seventh seal is opened which brings about the seven plagues. The people who repent will need to seek refuge somewhere if they are to survive the "worship or die" ultimatum. Perhaps the 144,000 are there to bear true witness concerning the plagues and call on people to repent, and to provide sanctuary for those who do. It's not for no reason that they come on the scene when they do.

The Main Objection to Repentance

Without fail, those who object to being able to repent of the mark and the image will point to the following or similar passage to support their claim.

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Revelation 14:9-10

What they fail to realize is that this passage applies to those who are actively, in the present, receiving of the mark and worshiping the image. It is stating that the wrath of God is poured out on those who continue to persist in worshiping the false prophet by utilizing his mark and conforming to the image.

I don't normally get into discussions about word usage but in this particular case I think doing so really helps to clarify the meaning. The verb form being used for the words that are translated “receives” and “worships” is the present, active form. This is used to specifically identify those who are **currently engaged** in receiving and worshiping, not those who at some point in the past received and worshiped.

As mentioned earlier, the point in time when the mark and the image emerge will be such a defining moment in history. There will be such dire consequences for those who continue in the idolatry of worshiping the false prophet. Even so, that is insufficient rationale for misrepresenting those consequences by stating that those who succumb to his deception and accept his mark can never be forgiven. Such a statement only serves to produce a false sense of hopelessness in those who believe it and happen to stumble during those days.

Discerning the Mark and the Image

As we continue to get closer to the day when the mark and the image become a reality, it's inevitable that there will be more "false positives." People have been trying to pin the tail on the Antichrist for a long time now with no success. Speculations also abound as to what the mark is and what 666 means, and I expect it will continue. It serves no useful purpose to speculate about these things. If anything, it has the effect of crying wolf.

There are certain characteristics about the false prophet, the mark, and the image that must exist in order for them to fulfill biblical prophecy. Becoming familiar with these traits according to the scriptures that provide them is the basis for discerning truth from error.

The False Prophet

Understanding who the false prophet is and what he does is relevant to discerning the mark and the image because the mark is specific to this person and it is he who gives the image life. Consequently, being able to identify the false prophet will lead to identifying his mark and the image.

When comparing Revelation 13:13-14 with Revelation 19:20, it shows that the beast who comes up out of the earth in Revelation 13:11 is the false prophet. Of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, he is the only human. The dragon and the beast are evil angels. From 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, we learn the following about the false prophet.

- He is referred to as the man of sin and son of perdition.
- He claims to be God and exalts himself above everything.
- His coming is in accord with satanic activity, with all power, deception, signs and false wonders.

From Revelation 13:11-18, the false prophet is described as:

- Speaking as a dragon (Satan).
- Performing signs and wonders that deceive the world.
- A man.

Based on these passages, the false prophet is a Satan-possessed man who claims to be God. He performs supernatural signs and wonders that deceive the world into thinking that he is God. The person responsible for bringing about the mark and the image will have these characteristics.

The single most important thing to remember about the return of Jesus is that **everyone** will see it for themselves. It will be as the lightening flashing from the east to the west. No one will have to be informed of His return. This single criterion is sufficient to identify the false prophet as false when he claims to be God and should never be forgotten. If you personally didn't see Jesus return with the clouds, then He didn't.

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and **every eye will see Him.**
Revelation 1:7a

According to Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5-10, the false prophet wages war against believers. He does this through the mark and the image.

The Mark

The mark is explicitly stated as being either the false prophet's name or the number of his name and is described in Revelation 13.

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six. Revelation 13:16-18

His mark is given on either the right hand or the forehead and is required before a person is able to buy or sell anything. Whoever has his mark can engage in the global commercial system he controls. Whoever doesn't, can't. People who repent of the mark will cease to receive of the buying and selling benefits it affords.

Characteristics of the false prophet's mark:

- required in order to buy or sell
- given on the right hand or forehead
- is the false prophet's name or number of his name

The mark will have all of these characteristics and must be given by someone who fits the description of the false prophet. Unless all the biblical criteria are met, cries of "wolf" can be safely dismissed.

The Image

In order to understand what the image of the beast is, it's necessary to understand who the beast is and what role he plays because the image will be his likeness. The image is made of the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. This is the beast in Revelation 13 with seven heads and ten horns that comes up out of the sea. Revelation 17 says he comes up out of the abyss, so the sea is used here as a metaphor for the abyss. Since the abyss is only ever used in the context of evil spirit beings, never humans, the beast is an evil angel, not a human.

This beast is the same beast in Daniel 7 that comes up out of the sea having ten horns. He is responsible for causing a world kingdom to exercise dominion much like the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece evil angels of Daniel 10. The false prophet will be his mouthpiece and the channel through which supernatural signs and wonders are manifested.

And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. Revelation 13:14-15

The wound of the sword is a reference to the false prophet's kingdom being attacked by three of the ten horns. This appears to be the death of his kingdom, which is also seen as the seventh head of the beast. However, through the use of supernatural powers, the false prophet is able to destroy his attackers by calling fire down from heaven. Consequently, no one is willing to wage war against him so his kingdom is seen as coming back to life.

The evil angel beast is the one who causes the false prophet to exercise dominion over the earth by the power he gives him to perform great signs and wonders. An image of that beast will likewise be something that causes the false prophet to exercise dominion.

Characteristics of the image:

- the deceived people who dwell on the earth collaborate on making it
- it is an image of the evil angel beast with seven heads and ten horns
- the image is given life and speaks
- whoever does not worship the image is to be killed

Based on these characteristics, the image of the beast is a code of conduct that affirms the false prophet as God and his dominion over the world. The false prophet gives this

image, or code of conduct, life by making it a law that everyone is to comply with what it requires. This is how the image is worshiped. It is obeyed or conformed to. Worship is lifestyle behavior. Those who refuse to conform to the mandates set forth in the code of conduct will be seen as enemies to be killed. I expect that the mark will be the "voice" of the image that will speak and identify those who do not comply with its terms.

Summary

The gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached around the world and events are now taking place that will culminate in the return of Christ. Jesus is returning for those who have chosen to belong to His kingdom. The unfolding of the events associated with the seven seals will give everyone the opportunity to demonstrate whose kingdom it is that they belong to. When He returns, the rule of the kingdom of darkness will come to an end. Everyone's allegiances will have already been determined. The wicked will be destroyed and the humble will inherit the earth.

On numerous occasions Jesus exhorted His followers to stay awake and be vigilant for His return. Those who have separated themselves from the ways of the world and have put into practice what Jesus taught will have the discernment to see through the deception of the last days. Those believers who haven't done so run the risk of being deceived by the false prophet. His mark and the image will serve to make that distinction because everyone will be forced to either accept them or reject them.

Those who were deceived into accepting the false prophet's mark and worshiping him as God via the image are the objects of God's judgment, which is brought to bear through a series of seven plagues. The plagues will convict people of their idolatry and they will respond by either hardening their hearts or by repenting. It will be a time of testing the hearts of all who dwell on the earth. Those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

The teaching that anyone who receives the mark has sealed their fate is simply without merit. It is the sin of idolatry which will be forgiven if repented of according to what Jesus taught. It is a serious sin to align oneself with the false prophet by accepting his mark and worshipping the image, and should be avoided at all costs, even death. However, it is a sin that will be forgiven if repented of.