

In Revelation 13 we are introduced to what some Bible scholars call a counterfeit trinity – the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land... who together deceive and lead the world astray.

Each one of these creatures is a sign of something beyond themselves; they represent a greater reality.

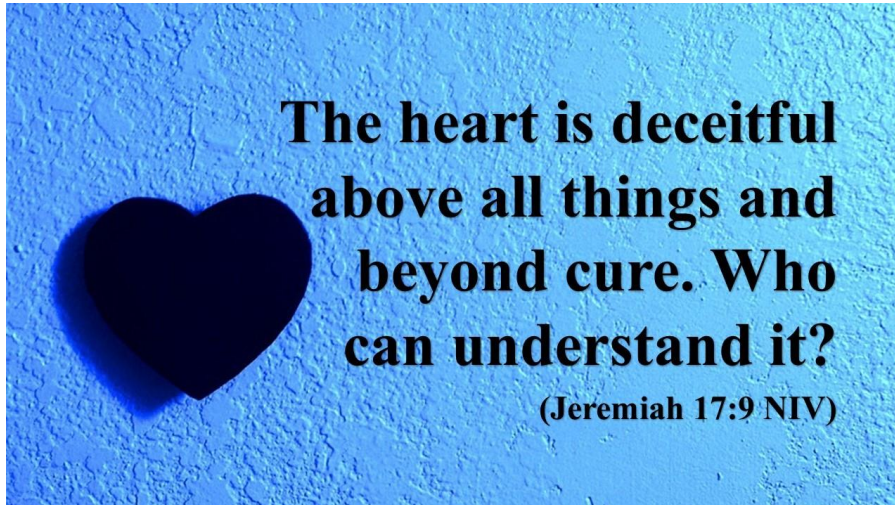
The same is true of the sea and the earth which the dragon stands upon and from which the two beasts come.

Something Jesus taught helps us in understanding what the sea and the earth are signs of, what they represent in this vision.

Mark 7:21

For from within, **out of a person's heart**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. **All these evils come from inside** and defile a person.

The source of sin is not outside of humanity, but is within.



This is what **the sign of the sea and the earth** point to. The two beasts come from within the human heart.

The sign of the dragon represents the leader of the fallen angels, who is identified in chapter 12 as the ancient serpent called Satan or the devil.

The sign of the beast represents human political power.

What Revelation 13 makes known to the reader is that the agenda of the dragon and the beast is the same regarding the church of Jesus.

The dragon (12:17)

“...makes war against...
those who obey God’s
commandments and
hold to the testimony
of Jesus.”

The beast (13:7)

“...makes war against
the saints...”

God reveals in his word that the dragon, wherever and whenever it can...
manipulates political power in order to pressure the people of God...
...to compromise their faith, and/or
...to crush their allegiance to Christ.

Today we will focus on the beast that comes out of the earth.



Before we answer the question “who,” we need to see from our passage “what”
this beast does.

The beast from the earth

...makes the earth, and its inhabitants worship the first beast

...deceives the inhabitants of the earth

...orders (the inhabitants of the earth) to set up an
image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the
sword and yet lived

...causes all who refuse to worship the image to be killed

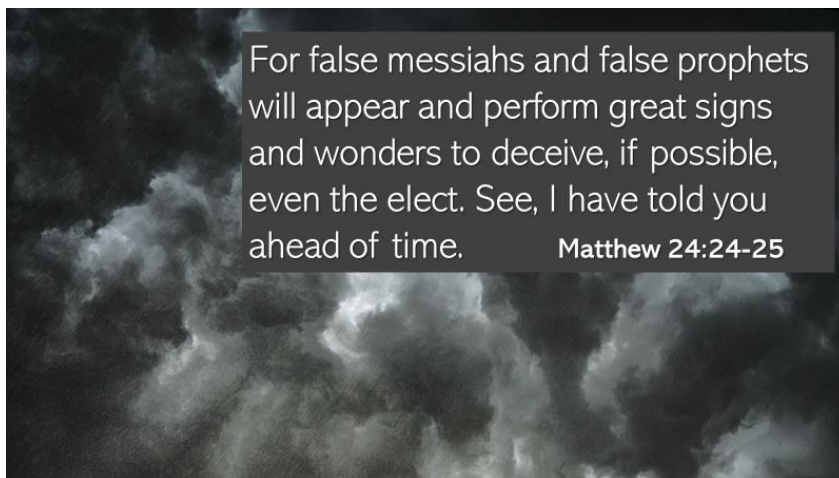
...forces all people...to receive a mark... which is the
name of the beast or the number of its name

The beast from the earth represents religion manipulated by the dragon. represents religious power...that compels worship of the beast from the sea which represent political power.

The seven churches from Asia would have understood all of this. This was the context in which they lived – government and religion working together... forcing people to worship and pledge their allegiance to a counterfeit god...in their case...Caesar.

Where does the beast from the earth get its authority and power? It gets its authority from the beast from the sea – look again at v.12. And from the dragon it is given power to perform signs – v.14.

Jesus had warned his disciples that this would happen in the last days. Jesus said...



It is important for us to see that similar to the beast from the sea... the intent of the beast from the earth is aligned with that of the dragon.

The dragon (12:9)
“...leads the whole world astray.”

The false prophet (13:14)
“...deceived the inhabitants of the earth.”

In what specific way?
Look at our passage again.

Revelation 13

v.12 – ... **he made** the inhabitants of the earth worship
the first beast (political power)

v.14 – ... **he ordered** the inhabitants of the earth to set up
an image in honor of the beast (political power)

v.15 – ... **he [gave]** breath to the image of the first beast
(political power), so that it could speak [and compel
worship while causing] all who refused to worship
the image to be killed.

The beast from the earth deceives in the area of worship.

God created humanity to be in relationship with him, to enjoy fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Spirit – to know him and to be known by him.

We were created to be enthralled by God, to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength... to center our lives in him.... to worship him.

Even though everyone is separated from God... human beings still worship... but now instinctively they turn to other things, powers, persons... to fill the void within which only God can fill.

The beast from the earth, inspired by the dragon, puts forward an alternate god – and champions this god...as being worthy.

Worthy though.... in what way?

Look again at v.3 and v.14.

Revelation 12

v.3 – One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but **the fatal wound had been healed.** The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast.

v.14 – [The beast from the earth] ordered [the inhabitants of the earth] to set up an image in honor of the beast who **was wounded by the sword and yet lived.**

What is this all about?

Who inflicted this wound upon the beast behind whom stands the dragon?

GK Beale explains:

The wound comes from God, because the Greek word for wound is the word translated “plague” eleven times elsewhere in Revelation, always signifying something of divine origin.

This wound on the beast’s head is none other than that **inflicted by Christ at his resurrection** and is the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 – ‘**He shall crush your head.**’

Mention of the sword that struck the beast’s head in 13:14 recalls the prophecy of Isaiah 27:1 – ‘In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword – his fierce, great and powerful sword – Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; **he will slay the dragon** that is in the sea.’

p.269

Satan’s reign of darkness, which was thrust upon the earth through political powers which he manipulated... the kingdoms of the world which he claimed as belonging to him and which he offered to Jesus if Jesus would worship him... he and his reign was struck a fatal blow by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But as you look across human history since the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus... it would seem as if the dragon has recovered, because he continues to be active through political powers and religious powers, in opposing God and people.

Why does God permit this?
For the sake of the gospel.

It is the glory of God to save the fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. And God does so, his work of rescue is ongoing, in this context – as the dragon and the beast from the earth and the sea war against his people; as they continue to deceive and manipulate the inhabitants of the earth.

There is one more aspect of our passage that we need to interact with.
Look again at v.16-18.

These three verses have been greatly misunderstood and have provoked great confusion and fear in people.

Is John describing a literal mark, or is he speaking metaphorically?
Look at Revelation 14:1.
Is the name written on the forehead literal or metaphorical?

The mark of Jesus on his followers is his character imprinted upon theirs as the Holy Spirit daily works to transform them.

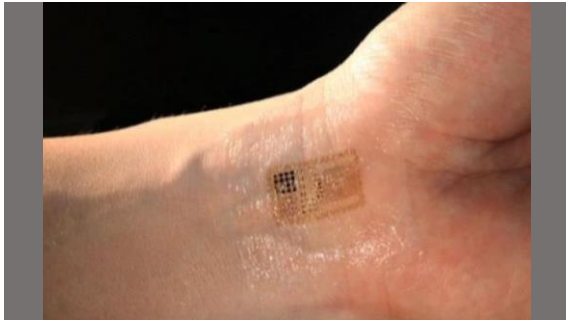


It is the same with the mark of the beast.

It is not a tattoo...



...nor a micro-chip embedded under one's skin.



"The mark of the beast is the character of the beast imprinted on the soul."

Darrell Johnson, p.246

The mark of the beast and the seal of Christ indicates to whom one belongs; to whom one gives allegiance; to whom one looks for salvation. Krodel, p.256.

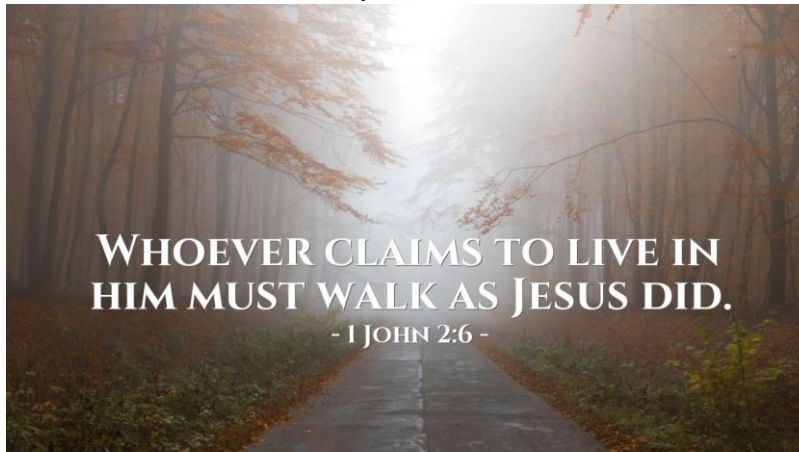
What does the reference to the forehead and the right-hand mean?

GK Beale explains: **The forehead represents one's ideological commitment and the hand the practical outworking of that commitment.**

One's actions are the overflow of one's convictions.

What one believes determines what one does.

John wrote in his first epistle, 2:6 ...



The follower of Jesus lives like Jesus.

The same is true of those who follow the beast.

What is the point being made by the number 666?

This number is a symbol.

It is as verse 18 says, "man's number."

Seven is the number of completeness.

The Revelation speaks in 1:4, 3:1, 4:5 and 5:6 of the seven Spirits of God, or the seven-fold Spirit.

The point being made is that the Holy Spirit is the complete Spirit.

Six is a number of incompleteness.

The purpose of the number – 666 – is not to identify, but to characterize.

Humanity's aspirations to live on the basis of their own political and religious authority and power is incomplete... it falls short in every way.

But why three six's?

Three, like seven... is the number of completeness.

Three six's communicate that humanity's aspirations without God are...



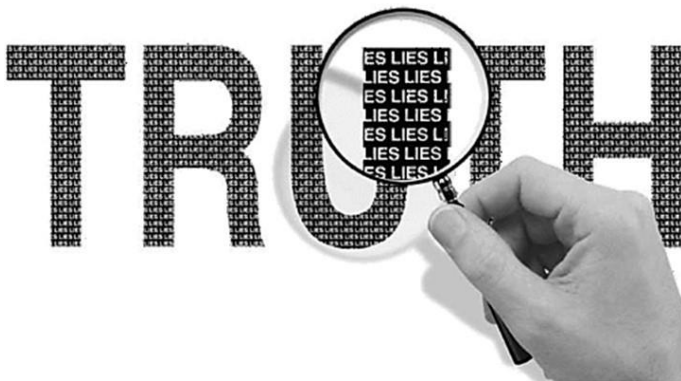
DJ, p.249

Let me leave you with several points of connection and application.

1. Regarding the voice of the beast from the earth – the passage states that he speaks like a dragon.

This is important for the follower of Jesus to recognize.

Pilate's question is as relevant today as when he first asked it of Jesus –
“What is truth?”

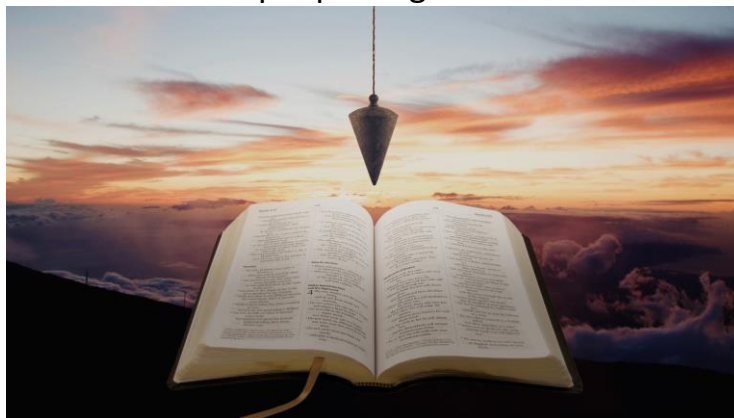


The war waged against the church is a conflict over truth.

We could add a second question from today's passage...



In order that his people might be able to discern...



...God provides us with this book...the Bible... which is our plumbline... against which... everything is measured and examined.

If something contradicts this book, then we know that something is a lie.
This is why it is so important that we know this book well.

2. The beast from the earth which is a sign of religious power is able to perform miracles and signs.

The passage would instruct the follower of Jesus to have a healthy suspicion of the spectacular.

Someone rightly said...



... “Not everything that glitters is gold.”

A key question we are to ask when we see miracles and signs... does this point people to Jesus Christ and bind them to him with cords of love and elicit from them a growing commitment and devotion?



3. We are reminded that religion can lose its way, just like political institutions, when it looks to and leans upon human ingenuity and resources to save and heal the world, rather than trusting in the living God, and his gospel of grace revealed in Jesus Christ.
4. The last point of connection is that in the time which the bible calls the last days... the war against the church of Jesus will be about worship.



Who will we worship?
Who will we love supremely?
Who will captivate our hearts?
Who will we adore?
Upon whom will we build out life?
Who will we center our lives in?

Our passage confirms... anything other than the triune God who reveals himself in the person of Jesus Christ... is completely incomplete.

As we begin to meet again in person it is with great anticipation.
It is as we gather together that we experience... sweet communion with God and one another and.... his joy filling and sustaining our lives.

One of the gifts given to the church in this year of pandemic is the reminder how precious worship with the people of God is.
There is no other time... no other place when this happens... when we gather in the name of Jesus and the triune God manifests his presence among us.

It is then and there that together we delight in all that our God is and express our love to the One who gave his life for us.