

# The Mark of the Beast

Revelation 13:16-18

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### Text

11 Now I saw another beast of prey coming up out of the land, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority of the first Beast in his presence; and he started to cause the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first Beast, whose mortal wound was healed. 13 And he performs great signs, including that fire should come down from heaven upon the earth before the people. 14 And he deceives my own people, those dwelling on the earth, by the signs that it was given to him to perform before the Beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the Beast who had the sword wound and lived. 15 And it was granted to him to give breath to the image of the Beast, so that the image of the Beast should actually speak, and should cause as many as would not worship the image of the Beast to be killed. 16 And he causes everyone—both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave—to receive marks on their right hand or on their foreheads, 17 so that no one would be able to buy or sell who does not have the mark, the name of the Beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the Beast, for it is the number of man — his number is 666.

Introduction - Note the context of Israel: this was only enforced on the conquered Jews in AD 70-74

Well, believe it or not, we are going to finish chapter 13 today. And it is an important chapter. Most people just focus on the Mark of the Beast, but the chapter as a whole is challenging believers not to have false saviors in state or church. Rushdoony summarized this chapter as God's perspective of man's utopian messianic ideals. Both Rome and Israel stand in stark contrast to the kingdom of Christ that was invading this earth in chapter 1.

For example, Rome trumpeted its ideal of peace on its coins, but God points out that apart from the grace of God transforming and the law of God informing society, man's peace always results in war, bloodshed, and disregard to human life.

Rome trumpeted the ideal of liberty - that the only way to have liberty was to submit to a one-world government (sort of like our United Nations promises). But God shows the end result of any definition of liberty that

throws off the Perfect Law of Liberty - it is enslavement. And this chapter describes enslavement. Enslavement is inescapable. If a society does not subject itself to God's Perfect Law of Liberty it automatically has the opposite of liberty.

Another ideal: Rome trumpeted the ideal of safety, and sought to stamp out pirates, terrorists, bandits, and other problems that threatened the safety of society. And we would say that's actually a good function of civil government. But the way Rome did it was to centralize civics and erode personal liberty. That's not good. And God's view of a centralized government is that it is anything but safe. He likens it to a wild beast who devours its own young.

This chapter is trying to convince us that if we ignore the kingdom of Christ that begins this book and ends this book, we will not have paradise; we will have the boot of our own version of Rome stamping on our face. Any society that casts God's law out of the public sphere has automatically become in some ways like these two beasts. And people think that democracy is surely an exception to that. Surely Democracy is the very definition of liberty. But Rushdoony says,

This is true not only of kings and dictators but of democracies also, with their blasphemous doctrine, vox populi, vox Dei, the voice of the people is the voice of God. Majorities are thereby equated with righteousness, and appeal beyond the government and its courts is rendered null and void: "god" has spoken only through his approved voice, the government.<sup>1</sup>

And this is so powerfully illustrated in the recent case in California where Sarah Lockner tried to flush her newborn baby down the toilet at McDonalds. The police rushed the baby to the hospital where it was revived. Sarah is being charged with attempted murder and is being held on \$11 million bail. People are outraged. But think about it - if she had gotten a third trimester abortion at the same hospital just minutes before, she would have been praised and defended. Why? Because even in a so-called democracy the voice of government has replaced the voice of God. What makes it murder now if it would have been praiseworthy two minutes earlier at a hospital? Certainly not the motives of the person. Certainly not the result. What makes the difference is the voice of government alone.

So Rushdoony says of this chapter, "Apostate man moves towards establishing a radically humanistic social order, in which God is abolished and man is his own law and law-giver." As far as God was concerned, both

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1 R. J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* ((Fairfax: Thorburn, 1978), p. 172.

the seceders and the maintainers of the union were humanistic to the core.

Last week we saw that the Zealots of Israel had tried to secede from Rome, and Rome in the best interests of all had to prevent it of course. So last week we saw that verses 11-16 were describing the war-time government of Israel, from AD 70-74. It was a time of martial law. Everything, including the economy was tightly controlled - in the "best interests of the citizens," of course.

And in today's passage we will see that war-time rations were only given to people who have been officially approved by the pro-Roman official government. You can think of it as being sort of like the World War II ration cards that were distributed by both the Allies and the Axis Powers. Don't just think it was the Nazis who did that. All statist tend to do this. When push comes to shove, they really don't believe in a free market. So, for example, if you wanted to get groceries in Holland or one of the other occupied countries, you had to use one of their ration book stamps, which were hard to counterfeit. You could get around the system, but it was difficult.

So the body of the land-beast was not the underground government of the Zealots, which by this time had almost been wiped out, but this was the newly emerged official government of Israel that was recognized by Rome. We saw that the head of the political body was Herod Agrippa II, the Jewish king. The two horns were his two prophets, Flavius Josephus and Yohannan ben Zakkai, both of whom also had political power. In fact, Yohannan was given permission by Titus to set up the new Sanhedrin (which was Israel's Supreme Court) in Yavneh, and Yohannan was the head of it.

### **I. Whatever its pretensions, statism aims to enslave people (v. 16) - marked on their right hands and foreheads during the military regime of AD 70-74**

So with that as a background, let's dig into each of these points. Though Agrippa, Josephus, and Yohannan protested that they were cooperating with Rome for Israel's good, and for its eventual liberty, and for its economic restoration, verse 16 exposes that as a lie. They were just as involved in enslaving Israel as Rome had been. Indeed, they were the enforcers for Titus. And this is symbolized by being branded on the right hand or on the forehead. Let's try to make sense of verse 16. It says, "And he causes everyone — both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave — to receive marks on their right hand or on their foreheads..."

## **A. The reason for the mark - the recent rebellion against Rome**

The reason for the mark was Rome's purported need to weed out all terrorism and insurgency of the Zealots. So crisis always leads states to take away liberties from all citizens.

Titus could have wiped Israel off the map, but he wanted this province bringing in taxes for his future. So he was using time-tested methods for subjugating the people, and controlling the food supply and the economy was one of those time-tested methods. The Allies and Axis Powers used food ration stamps. Titus, for convenience sake, used branding.

Secondly, this mark that they received was a testimony to his ownership of them. He could have enslaved all of them and shipped them off to Rome, but he "graciously" allowed some to stay in the land, but even those who stayed were considered to be his slaves; his property - thus the brand. So I've told you where I am going. Now let me try to demonstrate the reasonableness of this interpretation.

## **B. What it literally was in history**

Some have taken this mark as being just as invisible as the seal that God puts on the foreheads of His elect. As you know, I used to be inclined to that viewpoint. However, I have been convinced through more study that this was a very literal mark placed on very literal foreheads and hands, and I now believe this for three reasons.

First, it is the literal meaning of the Greek word *χάραγμα*, which refers to either a stamp-seal for commercial documents, a coin that was imprinted with an engraving of an image, or the mark left by a branding iron that had a symbol or words on it. This is a totally different word from the one that describes believers being sealed on their foreheads. That Greek word can refer to either a visible or an invisible seal. But this *charagma* is used of visible cuts, engravings, or brandings.

Second, it specifically mentions two parts of the body that received this *χάραγμα* - the forehead and the right hand. While Ezekiel does speak of God invisibly marking his elect on their foreheads, the mention of both forehead and right hand seem to indicate that this may be more than an invisible mark that only angels and demons can see.

Third, verse 17 makes it clear that it was illegal to buy or sell without that mark. So this implies that storekeepers were able to recognize those who had

the mark and those who did not. So for those three reasons I believe that this was a very visible mark that all could see during this occupation period. It was sort of like the Jews having to wear a badge on their clothing in Nazi Germany; only this would have been more painful.

And it is of course at this point that Futurists will jump all over our case and insist that we don't have any historical description of a visible mark forced upon every Jewish citizen. They will admit that we have plenty of evidence that he enforced what this mark symbolized, but the question is, "Did all Jews receive a literal mark somewhere on their bodies?" I believe the evidence is overwhelming that they did. Based on how Vespasian and Titus treated rebellions in other parts of the empire, and given the severity and duration of this rebellion and Titus's mandate to secure loyalty, it is inconceivable to me that these Jews would have escaped some kind of daily token that they were indeed in submission. Even the Romans had to be able to instantly recognize who was friend and who was foe.

But before I document why Rome's policies would have required this to have happened given Israel's rebellion, let me list two theories of how this might have been accomplished. And it is possible that both of these happened, with a brand being put on common people and a coin being tied to the foreheads of those that Caesar favored.

The coin theory is a more recent minority theory, so it needs to be subject to more evaluation. However, it has a lot of merit to it. One of the dictionary definitions of the Greek word for "mark," *χάραγμα*, is a coin with an image.<sup>2</sup> You can find that meaning in any number of Greek dictionaries. So Tyrian money that had no images may not have been *χάραγμα*, but Roman money would. Therefore Joseph Poon argues that this *χάραγμα* or mark was simply a reference to a Roman coin, and he points to literature that uses this term in exactly that way<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Taylor's fascinating essay on the Monetary

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2 Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Boston: Brill, 2015) defines it, "stamped sign, brand... coin money"; TDNT has, "This word denotes an engraved, etched, branded, or inscribed "mark" or "sign." It can be used for an "inscription" or a "stamp," e.g., the imperial stamp on decrees. The impress on coins gives it the more general sense of "money." The Exegetical Dictionary gives, "*Χάραγμα* can also be used of inscriptions, stamps on documents (esp. the seal of Caesar: cf. Deissmann, *Light* 340f.), brands on animals, impressions on coins (see BAGD s.v.; U. Wilckens, TDNT IX, 416), stigmatization of slaves, and religious stigmatization as a sign of belonging to a certain deity." Of course, that last definition and the following show that there is a wider range of definition than simply money: Strong's has "a scratch or etching, i.e. stamp (as a badge of servitude), or sculptured figure"; Mounce has "an imprinted mark"; NIDNTT has "mark, stamp, graven object" BDAG has "a mark that is engraved, etched, branded, cut, imprinted, mark, stamp... an object fashioned by artistic skill involving alteration of a medium, thing formed, image"; Louw and Nida have "a meaningful mark, whether engraved, imprinted, or branded"; Newman has "mark, stamp; image, representation."

3 Joseph Poon, *The Identities of the Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Land in Revelation 13*

Crisis in Rome during this period shows that Roman coins were called *χάραγμα*, and that in the mid-60's Nero began enforcing the use of Roman money rather than Tyrian money,<sup>4</sup> and that Vespasian and Titus continued that policy.

If this theory is true, you could paraphrase verse 16 this way: "And he causes everyone — both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave — to place Roman image coins on their right hand or on their foreheads..." So one interpretation could be that because the Zealots who started the war refused to touch or handle any Roman money because of the idolatrous images on it, all Jews were forced to strap a Roman coin either onto their head where their phylacteries were or to tie one on their right wrist as a bracelet. Without a coin with its blasphemous image on their body, they could not buy or sell. Titus was in effect seeking to ferret out any remaining Zealots through this policy. Zealots could instantly be detected this way because they would refuse to use Roman money, period. In light of Vespasian's and Titus' policies, this theory actually makes sense. The word *χάραγμα* can indeed be translated as a coin with an image. And if it was voluntary, it would doubly expose Zealots. You could forcibly brand a zealot, but you couldn't get him to voluntarily wear such a coin.

Theory two is that this word means either a tattoo or a branding on the forehead or hand. That meaning is just as common as the coin meaning, if not more so. And if it was a tattooing or a branding that is meant, this would not be the first time that Israelites had this happen to them. For example, when Ptolemy Philopator conquered the Jews, he forced the survivors to be branded with the sign of his religion. His edict said this: "those who are registered are also to be branded on their bodies by fire with the ivy-leaf symbol of Dionysus" (3Mac 2:29). If we didn't have that single sentence somehow preserved for us, we would have no historical record that Philopator had actually done this to all the Jews. He would have done it, but we just wouldn't have had a historical record. But even without that sentence, we could have looked at Philopator's policies elsewhere and assumed that he would do it to Israel just like he did it to other subjects. This was his policy. And that is my argument with regard to branding. Given Israel's rebellion, one would assume that all survivors were branded.<sup>5</sup> To me

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(Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), pp. 113 ff.

4 Deborah Furlan Taylor, "The Monetary Crisis in Revelation 13:17 and the Provenance of the Book of Revelation," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, volume 71, no. 3 (July 2009), pp. 580-596.

5 Some point to Suteonius' outrage that Caligula would brand free citizens as proof that Jewish citizens would not be branded. However, as will be pointed out, 1) the Jews were now captive (*capta*) not free, 2) they were Jewish, not Roman, 3) and they had just finished an extended rebellion against Rome and so anything short of death would be considered a mercy. Suetonius' outrage was that Roman nobility

this seems the more likely of the two theories, though as mentioned, Titus may have done both - favoring Jews that he liked with the coin policy and imposing branding or tattooing on the rest. The word could really cover both theories.

However, the reason I think it was likely branding is that branding foreheads and/or hands in exactly this manner was a common practice in those days. For example, runaway slaves were branded with the letters FUG, which stands for fugitivus or runaway.<sup>6</sup> But all slaves were called *stigmatias* (a related word to this word for "mark") because those slaves had been branded. Sometimes slaves were just routinely branded with the name of their master.<sup>7</sup>

If this is the reason why Titus branded the Jews, it was a declaration that they were his property. Certainly the coins he issued for several years after AD 70 had a woman under a palm tree with the words *Judea Capta* - Judea captive. This was Rome's policy for every country they conquered. Those citizens now belonged to Rome; they were Rome's property. And if you want to see some of the coins, there is a coin-page on the web<sup>8</sup> that has pictures of Roman coins with *Aegypto Capta*, *Armenia Capta*, *Germania Capta*, *Parthia Capta*, *Dacia Capta*, and *IUDAEA CAPTA*. These are distinguished from countries that were either wiped out (which had the word *devicta*, as in *Sarmatia Devicta*) or were countries that had more independence and were admitted freely into the Roman empire, like *Asia Recepta*. They were received, not enslaved. But the coins related to these countries proclaim the slavery - with some having chains around the outside. Interestingly, Agrippa II himself made a coin declaring Israel to be captive to Rome and on the other side having the title of his favorite emperor, Titus - *Καῖσαρ Σεβαστὸς Αυτοκράτωρ Τίτος*.

But there could have been other reasons to have the Jews branded. The historians Plutarch and Herodotus both record the practice of branding defeated soldiers,<sup>9</sup> and of course many of these Jewish survivors were

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were branded, not that branding happened: he says of Caligula: "After disfiguring many persons of honourable rank, by branding them in the face with hot irons, he condemned them to the mines, to work in repairing the high-ways..." C. Suetonius Tranquilius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, trans. Alexander Thomson and T. Forester; Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006), paragraph 896. [accord://read/Twelve\\_Caesars#896](http://read/Twelve_Caesars#896)

6 Barclay, *Great Themes of the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 105.

7 Barclay comments, "Ambrose says of slaves that they were 'inscribed with the seal of their master' (*De Obiit. Valentin.*, 58)." Barclay, *Great Themes of the New Testament* p. 105.

8 <http://coinweek.com/ancient-coins/capta-coinage-roman-imperial-conquest/>

9 Plutarch, *Pericles* 26; Herodotus 7.233. Barclay comments, "After their disastrous defeat under Nicias in the Sicilian campaign certain of the Athenians who were taken captive were branded on the forehead with the sign of a galloping horse, which was the Sicilian emblem (Plutarch, *Nicias*, 29). The sign of

defeated soldiers. That would have been an expected policy. But it didn't even need to have negative connotations. Caesar's own soldiers voluntarily branded themselves with his name or his symbol as a mark of loyalty, submission, and belonging. Barclay speaks of

...evidence that soldiers were branded on the hand with the name of their general. These marks are generally called stigmata. Aelian says that soldiers bear their stigmata on their hands: and Ambrose goes on to say that soldiers are signed with the name of their general.

I won't bore you with any more details about Rome's policies, but there is absolutely nothing unusual about Titus and the Jewish triumvirate requiring all of these conquered Jews to literally be branded. It fits the spirit of the times, and it certainly fits the rigor with which Titus sought to enforce loyalty to his father and to himself from every Jewish citizen. Actually, we would expect nothing less than this, knowing the situation. So to me, a literal branding makes the most sense, though I am open to the coin theory as possibly being one of the ways that they were allowed to wear the image of Caesar.

### ***C. What this literal mark symbolized***

I've already spoken to the next subpoint - of what this symbolized.

Numerous commentaries point out that every kind of branding that Rome did was a declaration of ownership of the people by the state. The state already acted as if it owned people by the way it taxed them, but this symbol would have made it crystal clear. Beale says,

If branding of slaves is in mind here, then the beast's worshipers are seen as his property... The mark is clearly figurative of the ways in which the state keeps check on whether people submit ...<sup>10</sup>

If the mark on the right hand symbolizes the ownership of what you produce, the mark on the forehead symbolizes the ownership of even your thoughts and devotion. But why the right hand, rather than the left? Because the right hand was dominant for most people, and it speaks to the dominance of statism over religion. You see, they wore a phylactery on their left hand and this image on the right. This is the exact reversal of what the Scripture called for. Scripture spoke of God claiming the right ear, right hand, and right foot (Ex. 29:20; Lev. 8:23-24; 14:14-17,25,27,28), but from this time onward, the Phylacteries were worn on the left hand (not by Scriptural mandate, but by Yohannan's traditions), and Rome claimed the right hand. This gave the Jews the ability to have dual loyalties - to serve two masters.

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ownership and subjection was branded on them."

10 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 715.

Rome would give freedom of religion to do a great deal, so long as Rome was acknowledged as Lord. Some think that a coin, a mark, or an image was put onto the phylacteries that were on the forehead. The point is, like the IRS, Caesar was very tolerant of all religions, so long as they would register and acknowledge that Caesar was indeed lord over all that went on in the religion.

And we may get to that point in America. America already treats citizens as if it owns them when it licenses our marriages, assigns numbers to our children, taxes our properties, insists on permits even of stuff we fix within the privacy of our houses, and insists that we fulfill thousands of laws that are utterly unrelated to legitimate running of civil government. It has already licensed most churches in the last fifty years and may one day force churches that refuse a license to go underground.

But this is the trajectory that the demon of statism is constantly driving all countries - total ownership of everything by the state. Communism has been the most consistent form of Statism, with North Korea even seeking to own the thoughts of the people. I was reading an eyewitness report of North Koreans being executed for not weeping sincerely enough in public or not rejoicing sincerely enough. Satan claims ownership, so it is not surprising that his agents push in that direction as well.

## **II. Whatever its pretensions, statism aims to control the economy (v. 17) - cannot buy or sell without the beast's permission. Three things gave permission to exchange goods during the military regime of AD 70-74:**

But let's move on to the next major point. It says, "Whatever its pretensions, statism aims to control the economy..." The pretensions were the promises made by Agrippa, Josephus, and Johanna that the compromises were being made for the well-being of the country and that they would make the country great and prosperous once again. But verse 17 shows that to be a lie. Even first century politicians apparently lied through their teeth. Here's the bottom line - any government willing to control the economy is not interested in your real well-being. Verse 17 says, "so that no one would be able to buy or sell who does not have the mark, the name of the Beast or the number of his name."

And you may think that we are so far removed from that that this is not even relevant. But don't be too sure. Can you buy or sell today with an alternate

currency to the Federal Reserve? Not really, Crypto-currency is really the closest anybody has gotten. Do we have a free market of health care? No. Do we have a free market of other businesses? Well, it depends on what you mean by free market. To me free market means free of any civic controls. When the state forces business to be their tax agent, are they really free? I had one international student tell me that America's problems are that it has way too much of a free market economy. You can imagine the debate that started. We haven't been a free market economy since the Federal Reserve was set up.

Statism aims to control the economy. The first point would only be a theoretical point without this second point. So while our money still has the words imprinted on them, "In God We Trust," the state has become the god that most people trust, and the state controls the money. If you doubt that, try to withdraw \$20,000 from your bank account sometime and see what happens. Or if you want to have even more adventure, try to take \$20,000 across the border on an airplane. You will be detained, and your money will likely be confiscated under the asset forfeiture laws that are current in America.

Another example is that it is technically illegal for stores to demand any other currency than American Federal Reserve Notes. Is that any different than what Nero and Titus did? It says on every piece of paper money, "This note is legal tender for all debts, public and private." So if you owe a store something and want to pay with Federal Reserve Notes (however inflated those notes might be), the store can't turn those notes down. Now, the store can take something else if the customer offers it. But the store can't insist on barter or the use of silver or gold. They must accept FRNs for all payments of debt. It is hard to fathom the degree of control that the Federal Government exerts on our economy, but if you read Ludvig von Mises, or Murray Rothbard, or Gary North's Biblical Economics, you will begin to realize that we are no longer a free market.

Verse 17 says, "so that no one would be able to buy or sell who does not have the mark, the name of the Beast or the number of his name." Under the military regime of Titus, Agrippa, Josephus, and Yohannan, there were three things that legally allowed a person to engage in exchange of goods.

### **A. *The mark of the beast***

The first was the mark of the beast. If Poon and Taylor are correct, and if this *χάραγμα* is simply a reference to coins with images on them, then Rome was

enforcing the use of Roman money. And of course, we know that had already started happening two years before. But if I'm correct, then they had to be branded.

### ***B. The name of the beast***

The name of the beast would be the name of whatever current emperor was on the throne. In this case, it would be the name, Titus Flavius Vespasianus, the name of both Vespasian and Titus his son. (They had identical names.)

### ***C. The "numerical total" (BDAG) of the name of the beast***

The third thing that qualified was the numerical total of the name of the beast. So in lieu of the full name, you could have 666 stamped somewhere. That would be very convenient because it was just three letters. We will talk about the numerical total (or the Gematria) in the next point, but for now, it appears that Titus was being flexible. Any one of those three things would qualify as a pass for purchasing things during the military occupation period. The word "or" indicates that it didn't have to be all three, but any one of those three.

But whether it involved a Roman coin, a branding, or both, those things show the same thing - that Caesar claims the right to intervene in or control the economy if needed because Caesar claims ownership of the economy. Any nation that purports to do so is likened by God to this demonic beast of prey. And I think Edward Griffin's book, *The Creature From Jekyll Island*<sup>11</sup> is aptly named. The Federal Reserve is bestial in nature.

But technically, both the first beast and the second refer to nations as a whole. Is America there? I believe it is. It may not be as intrusive right now as Titus' armies were, but then we aren't under martial law right now, are we? But it wouldn't take much to feel the jackboots. All it would take is a terrorist attack or some other crisis for our national to local police to start enforcing Caesar's wishes in every area of life. The path to total statism has gradually been paved by constant concessions of liberty over the past two hundred years. And at bottom, this is a form of the idolatry of Man - what we will deal with in the next point.

## **III. Whatever its pretensions, statism replaces God with Man (v. 18)**

The next point says, "Whatever its pretensions, statism replaces God with

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<sup>11</sup> G. Edward Griffin, [The Creature From Jekyll Island](#) (Westlake Village, CA: Reality Zone, 2012)

Man." And the reason I say pretensions is that Rome was proud of giving religious liberty to all. So if they promoted religious liberty, why did they persecute Christians? Because Christians didn't bow to the god of statism. They recognized statism as a form of idolatry. They refused to be pluralists. They had been warned by the book of Revelation.

But Josephus and Yohannan were compromised deceivers, and they insisted that they were interested in Jewish survival, not the removal of religious liberties. But they both were involved in accommodating the state's intrusions into religion. They both believed in the licensing of synagogues. There were still synagogues that did not get licensed in the empire, but by this time there were very few holdouts. So here is the bottom line - while they were pretending to make God the Lord of all, it was quite apparent that they were willing for Caesar to be lord of a lot of their life. Verse 18 shows that whatever its pretensions, statism replaces God with Man.

Here is wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the Beast, for it is the number of man — his number is 666.

This verse is one of the most abused verses in the Bible. Dr. Andrew Corbett correctly notes,

The speculation regarding this verse is breathtaking. At times it borders between sheer absurdity and utter ridiculousness! To suggest that this is a computer chip, barcodes, or even a global satellite tracking device numbering system, or a cashless financial system is just plainly nonsensical. This was an urgent message to the first generation of believers. None of these fanciful guesses could have possibly applied to them and they are therefore to be dismissed immediately.<sup>12</sup>

Now, while I agree with him that the fulfillment was in the first century, we shouldn't forget that the applications of that meaning continue to apply. And the reason the applications continue to apply is that the same demons that were at work successfully back then are likely doing similar things in our own country. Revelation doesn't just have application to the first century. In Revelation chapter 1 John calls all Christians to obey the admonitions of this book and to be blessed thereby. The meaning is one (and that one meaning was fulfilled in the first century), but the applications are many and for every age. But let's look at the first century fulfillment first.

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Andrew Corbett, *The Most Embarrassing Book in the Bible: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Legana, Tasmania: Andrew Corbett, 2004-2006), ebook, location 1224.

## **A. The literal referent of 666**

**B. In Gematria, the numerical value of each letter in a word needs to be added up (ἀριθμός v. 17; ψηφίζω v. 18). ἀριθμός is "addition" "numerical total" (BDAG), "code, cipher, gematria" (NIDNTT) of a name (v. 17); ψηφίζω means, "to add up digits and calculate a total, count (up), calculate" (BDAG)**

And to understand that fulfillment, you need to understand the rules governing the ancient system known as Gematria by the Jews and known as isopsephia by Greeks. The Greek word for "number" in verse 17 is a word that refers to the addition of the numeric values of the letters, and the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology points out that it is also a reference to what goes on in Gematria.<sup>13</sup> John is specifically telling people who are wise to put their thinking caps on and to engage in Gematria.

Gematria was considered to be a fun puzzle, where you see letters standing for numbers and then add up those numbers. That is why verse 18 says, "calculate the number of the beast." The word for "calculate" refers to simple addition.<sup>14</sup> So automatically, if simple addition of the numeric values of letters is involved (which the Greek words indicate), you can rule out most modern interpretations - for example, that require six letters in each of three names (like Ronald Wilson Reagan), or that require a conversion from ASCII code to something else, or that require other sophisticate mathematics. No. The two Greek words indicate simple addition of the numeric value of letters.

Would the Jewish Christian readers have even known how to do this? And that is a legitimate question. And the answer is, Yes. Absolutely yes. It was a common puzzle in the Hebrew language. But you also see Gematria

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13 "In the popular and religious and philosophical thought of Hellenism gematria (the process of encoding a word by adding together the numerical value of its component letters) gained great significance. The decoding of a gematrical number was only possible for the initiated, since the sum itself is ambiguous. The scribbling found on a wall in Pompeii (before A.D. 79) which runs: "I love her whose number is 545" might be called a kind of gematrical frivolity. The combination of three words with the numerical value 284 (Gaios — hagos — agathos, found by adding together the value of the individual letters) in a Roman inscription is even more odd. Gaios (numerical value: 3 + 1 + 10 + 70 + 200) is at the same time to be called a hagos (pure; numerical value: 1 + 3 + 10 + 70 + 200) and an agathos (good, fine; numerical value: 1 + 3 + 1 + 9 + 70 + 200) man. The words are interchangeable from the point of view of gematria, because they are of equal value. The "number of the year" Abrasax, 365, mentioned in the Leiden magical papyrus, betrays the stamp of a speculative gematria, which arbitrarily replaces the number of days in a year by a meaningless — but therefore all the more mysterious — word; the word Abrasax retains its mysterious character in later gnostic texts." The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology," NIDNTT, paragraph 4. [accord://read/NIDNTT#9546](http://read/NIDNTT#9546)

14 "to add up digits and calculate a total, count (up), calculate" (BDAG)

throughout the ancient world. I've skimmed through books on ancient graffiti<sup>15</sup> and even the immature and anti-social graffiti vandals of the ancient world knew the rules of Gematria. For example, on a wall in Pompeii is scratched these words: "I love her whose number is 545."<sup>16</sup> OK? He had added up the value of the letters in her name, and they came to 545. On the same wall there is another reference to a girl's name, and the name is added up by the rules of Gematria. It says,

Amerimnus thought upon his lady Harmonia for good. The number of her honorable name is 45."<sup>17</sup>

Let me illustrate the difference between straight numbers and Gematria. First, straight numbers. They didn't have numbers separate from the Alphabet in Greece or Israel. The first letter of the Alphabet would serve as an A or as a number 1. So if we were to convert English letters into numbers, with A being 1, B being 2, and C being 3, ABC would be the number 123, and we would know it was 123 because there are no vowels in ABC and therefore the letters ABC don't make a word. So automatically you would know it was a number and not a word.

But Gematria is different. It doesn't read the word as a number; it converts a word or a name to another number by adding up the numeric value of each letter. So let's pretend that ABC was a word. If you knew that ABC was a gematria, you would add each letter. So 1, plus, 2, plus 3 would be six. So the Gematria of ABC would be 6.

And this was such a commonly used device in the ancient world that all that a reader would have to do is add up the name of the current emperor to see if he was the one being talked about. When you follow the strict rules of Gematria, there really aren't very many candidates in history that fit.

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15 For example, [https://smile.amazon.com/Ancient-Graffiti-Context-Routledge-Studies/dp/0415653525/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-2&keywords=ancient+graffiti](https://smile.amazon.com/Ancient-Graffiti-Context-Routledge-Studies/dp/0415653525/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-2&keywords=ancient+graffiti) and [https://smile.amazon.com/Graffiti-Basilica-Smyrna-Institute-Ancient/dp/1479864641/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-3&keywords=ancient+graffiti](https://smile.amazon.com/Graffiti-Basilica-Smyrna-Institute-Ancient/dp/1479864641/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-3&keywords=ancient+graffiti) and [https://smile.amazon.com/Popular-History-Graffiti-Ancient-Present/dp/1616088680/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-1&keywords=ancient+graffiti](https://smile.amazon.com/Popular-History-Graffiti-Ancient-Present/dp/1616088680/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-1&keywords=ancient+graffiti) and [https://smile.amazon.com/Graffiti-Athenian-Agora-Picture-Book/dp/0876616333/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-4&keywords=ancient+graffiti](https://smile.amazon.com/Graffiti-Athenian-Agora-Picture-Book/dp/0876616333/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817244&sr=1-4&keywords=ancient+graffiti) and [https://smile.amazon.com/Graffiti-Literary-Landscape-Roman-Pompeii/dp/0199684618/ref=sr\\_1\\_13?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817407&sr=1-13&keywords=ancient+graffiti](https://smile.amazon.com/Graffiti-Literary-Landscape-Roman-Pompeii/dp/0199684618/ref=sr_1_13?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817407&sr=1-13&keywords=ancient+graffiti) and [https://smile.amazon.com/Rock-Inscriptions-Graffiti-Project-Catalogue/dp/1555407927/ref=sr\\_1\\_67?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817549&sr=1-67&keywords=ancient+graffiti](https://smile.amazon.com/Rock-Inscriptions-Graffiti-Project-Catalogue/dp/1555407927/ref=sr_1_67?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506817549&sr=1-67&keywords=ancient+graffiti)

16 Adolf Deissmann and Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan, *Light from the Ancient East the New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 276-277.

17 Ibid.

But this text says that there would be three separate things in AD 70 that the Gematria would fit, and almost no one talks about those three separate things; they kind of mush them together. First, verse 18 says it is the number of the Beast itself. Second, verse 17 says that it is the number value of the name of the individual beast that had been fighting Israel. Who had a name? It's the emperor who has a name. And third, verse 18 also says that it is the number of man. Let's look at each of those three.

### ***C. It is the number of the beast (v. 18b)***

First, it is the number of the beast. And you can see from your outlines that the very word "beast" is rendered into 666 in both Greek and Hebrew. Commentators have pointed out that one of the Hebrew words for dragon (שֶׁשׁוּל) is also a Gematria for 666. And you can see why a demon would be fascinated with and identify with the number 666. It has long been an occult symbol because of the fascinating properties of the number. For example, it is a triangular number, which means that it is the sum of every whole number from one to 36. So if you drew a dot, then under it two dots, then three, then four, etc until you had 36 at the bottom, it would add up to 666 dots and be in the shape of a triangle. And that triangle would have twelve triangles within itself. So it is the sum of every whole number from 1 to 36. And 36 itself is triangular, and is also the square of 6. And if you study the mathematical properties of 666, you can see why the occultists absolutely love this number. To me it is no surprise to see a demon that had authority over a nation gladly taking the occult number 666 and gladly embracing the name Therion, which adds up to 666. If even the dragon took that 666 to himself, why not the beast? And you can see in your outlines that one of the Hebrew words for "dragon" is a Gematria that adds up to 666. Even the way this number is written in the Majority Text looks ominous. The way it is pronounced is a serpent's hiss, and the middle letter looks like a twisted serpent: χξς It's kind of a scary looking word.

And I point all of this out to you because we need to remember that the beast is first and foremost a demon. We have been consistently harping on that point every since chapter 11:7. Those he possesses bear his name because they take on the demon's characteristics. So both Greek and Hebrew point to the demon beast being 666. This shows the occult background to what is happening in this period of history. It's yet another indication that there is a lot of demonic going on.

## The demon beast - the occult background to 666

**Greek of the great beast:** τὸ μέγα θηρίον = τ (300) ò (70) μ (40) ξ (5) γ (3) α (1) θ (9) η (8) ρ (100) ί (10) ο (70) ν (50) = 666

**Hebrew of therion (beast):** ) =50) ן (6) ו (10) י (200) ך (400) ת = תריון  
666

**Hebrew of "dragon" = ) =30) ל (6) ו (300) ש (30) ל (300) ש = שלשול  
666**

## The empire beast

But the visible empire controlled by the demon is also a Gematria for 666. The earliest commentary on this verse was by Irenaeus in the second century, and he applies this prophecy to Rome, Daniel's fourth empire.<sup>18</sup> He said that one of the common names for the empire of Rome as a whole was the name Lateinos. As he pointed out, Lateinos is a Gematria for 666. Another common name for Rome was η Ιταλη Βασιλεια. You can see from your outlines that the value of that Gematria is also 666.

But there is more: several authors have pointed out that the first initials of the emperors from Julius Caesar to Vespasian in exactly the way that those initials were written in the famous Sibylline Oracles adds up to 666.<sup>19</sup> And this confirms Chilton's view that the number must relate to the corporate beast and not just to the individual beast, or emperor. So the beast itself calculates to 666 five different ways, whether you think of it as the demon or as the corporate empire controlled by the demon.

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18 He said "Then also Lateinos (Lateinos) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule:" (5Ireneus 30:3 APOL-E) accord://read/APOL-E#5Iren.\_30:3

19 Giet, S. L'Apocalypse et l'Histoire. Paris: University of Paris, 1957. As cited by Robert H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), p. 261.

**Greek for name of empire:**

**LATEINOS = L (30) A (1) T (300) E (5) I (10) N (50) O (70) S (200) = 666**

**η Ιταλη Βασιλεια = η (8) Ι (7) τ (300) α (1) λ (30) η (8) Β (2) α (1) σ (200) ι (7) λ (30) ε (5) ι (7) α (1) = 666**

**Initials of emperors Julius Caesar to Vespasian (as seen in Sibylline Oracles) K (20) Σ (200), T (300), Γ (3), K (20), N (50), Γ (3), O (70) = 666**

***D. It is the number of the name of the individual beast who had conquered them - Titus (v. 17 in context)***

But verse 17 also says that this number is the number of the name of the individual beast who had put these war-time measures upon them. In other words, it is the number of the individual beast, Titus, the man whom John has just finished talking about over the last several verses. Did Nero also add up to 666? Yes; sort of. And on the website I will show how Nero's name adds up in one Hebrew spelling.<sup>20</sup> And since Vespasian had exactly the same name and title as his son Titus, the Gematria fits Vespasian as well. It makes sense that each emperor that this beast had possessed would providentially bear this symbol - especially if he had persecuted the saints, and that persecution went from Nero through the Flavians. Nero was definitely a beast and even the Roman historians call him a beast. He dressed up like a beast when he raped victims. But Nero (the seventh head) was already dead by verse 12 of this chapter. In fact, the second half of verse 12 is post Vespasian.

And since context is king in interpretation, we need to acknowledge that the context makes it clear that the specific emperor (the specific head) that he is talking about in these verses is not Nero, or Vespasian, or Domitian. It is the emperor who was still in the land of Israel in AD 70 and following. Both Vespasian and Titus were declared co-emperors at the same time in AD 69, but it was Titus who was in the land of Israel enforcing these war-time measures. And Rome itself issued a coin calling Titus Caesar in AD 70. But does Titus' name actually add up to 666? Yes it does, and it does so far far more clearly than Nero's name did.

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20 One spelling of Nero Caesar is ) =200) ך (60) ס (100) ק (50) ן (6) ו (200) ך (50) ן = נורנ ריסק = 666

**Greek form of Titus written on Caesarean coins =  $\tau\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\nu = \tau$  (300)  $\epsilon$  (5)  $\iota$  (10)  $\tau$  (300)  $\alpha$  (1)  $\nu$  (50) = 666**

His family name was named after the Greek gods called "Titans," who were rebels against God.<sup>21</sup> Ireneaus was a very early church father who first solved this Gematria as referring to both the empire of Rome (Daniel's fourth kingdom) and to a ruler of Rome with the name  $\tau\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\nu$ . Well, it just so happens that Titus is called a Titon on the coins, and this deification not only harks back to the original myth of the Titans but to the Sun god. Your outline shows how that Gematria comes to 666.<sup>22</sup> Burnett points out that this very form of Titus' name is used in Latin on various coins,<sup>23</sup> and when transliterated back into Greek would have the form I gave in your outlines. So if the Gematria was meant to be calculated using the Greek text, which is what Revelation was written in, then we have Titus being a prime candidate. There is no Greek gematria that fits for Nero.

**Greek of Vespasian's year one coin =  $\text{Βασπασιανον}+1 = \text{B}$  (2)  $\alpha$  (1)  $\sigma$  (200)  $\pi$  (80)  $\alpha$  (1)  $\sigma$  (200)  $\iota$  (10)  $\alpha$  (1)  $\nu$  (50)  $\omicron$  (70)  $\nu$  (50) +1 ~666**

But the Greek of his last name, Vespasian, adds up to 665. That doesn't initially seem to work until you look at coins minted in his first year, which have the symbol for year one on them. Well, add up the letters for the name plus the symbol for one and you have 666. And the first year of Vespasian was indeed the time period we have been talking about, and it was also Titus' first year as co-emperor. But those first two are just added bonuses. You can ignore them if you want because the Nero advocates insist that for Hebrew Christians it would make sense to have the Gematria in Hebrew.

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21 Barclay, Great Themes of the New Testament p. 101

22 Just as people use the manuscript correction that has 616 to show that Nero (with a different spelling) was meant, the same argument could be made for Titus. If the final  $\nu$  is dropped, the result is a variant spelling of  $\tau\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha$ , which adds up to 616. Perhaps a scribe who thought this referred to Titus thought 666 was wrong because he had the other spelling in mind. I am loath to make theological conclusions based on such speculation, but since it seems to be a critical argument in favor of Nero being referred to here, I thought I would point out that it equally applies to Titus.

23 This involves converting the accusative form of Titon (Latin found on coins) into the Greek phonetic equivalent, Teitan. Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandry, and Ian Carradice, Roman Provincial Coinage, volume II, part II, From Vespasian to Domitian (London: British Museum Press, 1999), p. 354. For statue see volume II, part 1, p. 194.

## Hebrew of Titus Flavius Vespasianus Augustus = טיטוס בלביוס בספסיאנוס אגוסטוס

= ט (9) י (10) ט (9) ד (60) ב (2) ל (30) ב (2) י (10) ו (6) ד (60) ב (2) ד (60)  
פ (80) ד (60) י (10) א (1) נ (50) ו (6) ד (60) א (1) ג (3) ו (6) ד (60) ט (9) ד (60) = 666

And I first stumbled onto the Hebrew connection in Isbon Beckwith's comments<sup>24</sup> that the full title for Titus: Titus Flavius Vespasianus Augustus, adds up to 666 when transliterated into Hebrew. The audience was Hebrew Christians who spoke in Hebrew and thought in Hebrew, so it would be natural for them to do Gematria in Hebrew. So this insight of Isbon Beckwith and two or three other commentators was really fascinating to me. But being the skeptic that I am, I wanted to verify. So I added the Hebrew letters up manually, and quadruple checked the calculations, then put the letters into an online Hebrew Gematria calculator, and they always come out to exactly 666. What is most remarkable about this is that this is the full name exactly as it appears on Titus' coins.

So there are actually three ways in which Titus' name appears as 666. No other emperor candidate fits as perfectly as this. And of course, the context would demand it anyway. So, sorry to disappoint those of you who hoped I would pick on Nero. There are plenty of other places in the book that pick on Nero. But the mark of the Beast as described in this verse is definitely a mark that they were supposed to look out for after Nero died in verse 12 and after the empire had revived in AD 69, as symbolized in verses 12 and 14. So this number not only fits the demon, it also fits the empire, and it fits Titus himself. And that makes sense since we have already shown how John moves back and forth between the demon as beast and describing the emperors and empire controlled by the demon as also being the beast. So the mystery is solved.

### ***E. It is the number of Man (v. 18)***

But there is actually one more thing that John says is a Gematria of 666 - man or mankind. The last phrase of verse 18 says, "for it is the number of man — his number is 666." Man as man is somehow related to this number. And David Chilton probably does as good a job as anyone in explaining how fallen man is symbolized by this number.<sup>25</sup> Six is the symbol of

<sup>24</sup> Isbon Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), p. 645.

<sup>25</sup> David Chilton, [Days of Vengeance](#)9a9d367b-6933-4776-97f2-1598c764547f, (Forth Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 344-352.

incompleteness. It falls short of 7, which is perfection. And this number six and its multiples is connected in Scripture with the day man was created, with Goliath, with the image of a man in Daniel 2, representing the humanism of the four bestial empires, and in other places. And Daniel 2 is particularly interesting. Chilton points out that the meticulous Hebrew scribes counted up the numerical value of the Hebrew letters in Daniel 3:1, which describes Nebuchadnezzar's statute of man, and the value of 666 is repeated seven times plus the number 21. But there are other places where fallen and rebellious man is linked to 666. Both Chronicles and Kings mention that when Solomon started operating in his own wisdom, his own strength, and his own backslidden power, he started piling up gold, wives, and horses in disobedience to God's law. And the text says that he received 666 talents of gold every year (1 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 9:13). Chilton says, "For the Hebrews, 666 was a fearful sign of apostasy, the mark of both a king and a kingdom in the Dragon's image." Some of his explanations are hard to follow, but I think a contrast is sufficient to show you how hopeless man is without Christ.

The Gematrial value of the name Jesus in Greek is 888. Eight signifies new beginnings in the Scripture, and early church fathers contrasted the number of man with the number of the restoration Man, Jesus, who makes a new humanity. Chilton said,

Man was born with the number of his creation; the repetition of the number reveals Man in opposition to God, trying to increase his number, attempting to transcend his creaturehood. But, try as he might, he can be nothing more than a six, or a series of sixes.<sup>26</sup>

Only in Jesus Christ can we transcend the frustrating limitations of the number of Man and operate in the realm of the supernatural. It is only as we live in Christ and Christ lives through us that we can overcome the limitations signified by this number.

But it is an encouraging thing to me that Rome was not omnipotent or unbeatable. It too had the limitations built into the number 666. Do not despair over the power of the state; it is no match for Jesus. Statism will one day be defeated and mankind will be converted to Christianity. 666 will give way to 888 through the perfect plan of God, who is 777.<sup>27</sup>

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26 David Chilton, [Days of Vengeance](#)9a9d367b-6933-4776-97f2-1598c764547f, (Forth Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 345.

27 In creation week, seven was the number of completion when God rested from his creative work. And the number 7 becomes a symbol of completeness throughout Scripture. Interestingly, the sum of the letters in the nouns in Genesis 1:1 for God, heavens, and earth (all perfect) is 777. The Hebrew for "YESHUA Saves" = 777 (yod, shin, waw, ayin, he, waw, shin yod, and ayin = 10+300+6+70+5+6+300+10+70=777). The Hebrew Gematria of "King of kings and Lord of lords" is 777. In the Greek, "Church of God" (1Ti.3:15), "Tabernacle of God" (Rev.21:3), and "Love of God"

## **IV. Christians are called to wise discernment (v. 18). Like the sons of Issachar,**

And so John ends with a heads up to all believers that they are called to discernment. "Here is wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the Beast, for it is the number of man — his number is 666." Knowledge is filling our heads with facts. Understanding is knowing how those facts fit together in a systematic way. Wisdom is knowing how to apply those facts to all of life. So I will end by calling you to be sons of Issachar who do all three things. 1 Chronicles 12:32 speaks of "the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, [to have the wisdom] to know what Israel ought to do."

### ***A. They must know the times***

So this morning I call you to try to have understanding of the times that you live in. That's what the book of Revelation was encouraging the first century church to do. Look at life through God's eyes. Don't fall into the trap of thinking the world's thoughts after them; think God's thoughts after Him. There is analysis of modern culture that is much better than Rush Limbaugh. It's less entertaining, but it will give you understanding. And if you want a mixture of entertainment and understanding, try the Firebreathing Christian blog. But try to understand the times.

### ***B. They must know God's Word***

And to be able to do that, you have to study the Word of God. Be willing to put your thinking caps on on Sunday mornings and not just turn your minds off if it is boring. The Word of God is applicable to all of life, and we must understand it. We can't be eating milk all our lives. We need to dive into the steak of the word. Can you imagine how shallow homeschooling would be if it was always and only interesting? Part of Sabbath observance is deep teaching.

### ***C. They must be able to guide other Christians in what to do***

And finally, be willing to guide other Christians into what they should do to navigate the times that we live in. Spread the message. Most Christians do not have a clue of the ways they are compromising the Scriptures every day of their lives. For example, they embrace democracy as if it is a good alternative to dictatorship. No it is not. As Benjamin Franklin has often been misquoted as saying, "Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what

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(Romans 8:39) are each valued at 777.

to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote."

Well, Revelation gives an even better antidote. It tells us that all forms of statism are demonic and we should seek to cage or chain down the beast of government because it is dangerous. For sure do not trust the beast to be your Savior. If there is no other message that you catch from this chapter than this: that without Christ's grace transforming and his law informing civil governments, they are beasts, then you will still have learned a valuable lesson. You will have learned that it is disastrous for Christians to stop being salt and light in culture. All of life will one day be put under the feet of Jesus, and we should be a part of that process. Amen. Let's pray.