

The Mark of the Beast and Buying and Selling

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In a recent sermon, Pastor David Jeremiah called the COVID-19 pandemic “the most apocalyptic thing that has ever happened to us.” Really? Not the black plague that killed 30 to 60 percent of Europe’s population, two world wars, ((Some 75 million people died in World War II, including about 20 million military personnel and 40 million civilians, many of whom died from deliberate genocide, massacres, mass-bombings, disease, and starvation.)) the economic crisis of the Great Depression, the Dustbowl of the 1930s, or the Spanish Flu that killed 50 million people at a time when the world population was less than two billion?

What about the COVID-19 virus? Presently, 140,773 people out of the 7.8 billion people in the world today have died from the virus. That is slightly more than 0.00018047% of the world population, nothing anything near the black plague or Spanish Flu.

Even so, prophetic speculation has been running rampant based on how some local governments are attempting to deal with the spread of the virus. For example, [Valley County in Montana](#) had mandated “that people wear government-issued pink arm bands in [order] to purchase products inside of stores. The measure, enforced by the Valley County Health Department, insists that store-owners keep customers out unless they have the pink arm-bands, which denote the customer has been in the area more than 14 days and submitted to quarantine protocol.”

Some people compared the directive to how the Nazis identified people suspected of being homosexual by having them wear a triangle patch and, of course, Jews with a Star of David patch and number tattoos.

It didn't take long before "the Valley County Commissioners offered ... [an] apology and 'retraction' of the health department's flier."

Similar identification methods are being proposed that could limit people's ability to move freely and buy and sell in the name of public health and well-being. As expected, Christians have pointed to [Revelation 13:16–17](#).

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the freemen 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.

It's obvious that this chapter is not describing a modern-day technological society because in Revelation 6, the earth would have been devastated by "the stars" that fell from the heavens "to the earth" (v. 13). And if that didn't mess things up, in Revelation 12, we read about a "great red dragon" whose "tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (vv. 3–4). How could the earth survive let alone keep track of people implanted with microchips or Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) implants after such devastation? If stars hit the earth, the earth would not exist. If these stars are meteorites, the destruction they would bring would wipe out civilization as we know it.

If it's claimed that [Revelation 13:16–17](#) is being fulfilled today, then when did what is described in chapters 6 and 12 happen? The book of Revelation is not about the antichrist controlling the world. (The word never appears in Revelation). It's a Revelation, an unveiling (the meaning of the Greek word Ἀποκάλυψις/ [Apokalypsis](#) [[Rev. 1:1](#)]), of a covenantal judgment that came upon Israel because of covenantal unfaithfulness ([Matt. 21:43–46](#); [22: 1–14](#); [23–24](#)).

This revelation is shown to John as "signs" in the form of a vision. The stars falling to earth, a red dragon, a giant woman (12:1–4) are symbols. This means that what we find in [Revelation 13:16–17](#) should be interpreted in a similar way in terms of how the Bible interprets such images (beasts, markings on the right hand and forehead, 666, etc.)

Let's begin at the beginning. Jesus told the church of Laodicea, "I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" ([Rev. 3:18](#)). There is no market available to make such a purchase. Purchasing a commodity like oil for lamps to greet the bridegroom is not about economics but worship ([Matt. 25:6–13](#)).

In the same way, buying gold refined by fire is symbolic and is also related to worship. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the reference to buying and selling in [Revelation 13:17](#) is also symbolic and not part of an end-time economic system or even one in the first century. Similar language is found in the Old Testament:

Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance ([Isa. 55:1–2](#); cf. [John 4:13–15](#); [Rev. 21:6](#)).

Temple leaders controlled buying and selling to regulate access to the temple ([John 2:12–22](#); [Matt. 21:12](#)). It's why Jesus cleanses the temple twice as required by [Leviticus 14:33–57](#). "This is established in [Revelation] 3:18 (and compare 21:6). When those who refuse the mark of the Beast are not allowed to buy and sell, it means that they are expelled from the synagogue and Temple. The merchants of the land in Revelation 18 are those who worshipped at the Temple and synagogue." ((James B. Jordan, *A Brief Reader's Guide to Revelation* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1999), 19. James was the person who suggested this interpretation. I'm indebted to him for it.))

Jesus foretold that this would happen: "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" ([John 16:2](#)). Keep in mind that the "beast coming up out of the earth" is involved in these events. The land beast is most certainly associated with first-century Israel, especially the priests who controlled access to the temple, which was finished during Nero's reign in AD 64.

Early in the church's history the disciples went to the temple to preach the gospel ([Acts 5:20–21](#), [24](#), [42](#); [24:12](#)). At first, they were welcomed (2:46). Peter and John frequented the temple during "the hour of prayer" (3:1). Jewish Christians continued to use the temple, even participating in some of its rituals (21:26). After the temple officials learned that those Jews were preaching that Jesus was the Messiah—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—Paul was "dragged ... out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut" (21:26–30).

During Jesus' ministry, the temple officials were "selling," and worshipers were "buying" access to the temple ([Matt. 21:12](#)), turning God's house into a "robbers' den" ([Matt.](#)

[21:12–13](#)). Only the Jews who aligned themselves with the priests (i.e., had the “mark of the beast”), the sacrificial system, and the temple buildings, could enter the temple for worship.

To take the “mark of the beast” meant a person denied that Jesus was the Messiah, the true temple of God, the only sufficient sacrifice ([Heb. 9](#)). Of course, Christian Jews avoided the “mark of the beast” and showed their true allegiance to Jesus, “having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads” ([Rev. 14:1](#)). They demonstrated that these (symbolic) names on their foreheads through their public professions of faith and allegiance to Jesus. Those who carried the mark of the beast professed that they had chosen Caesar over Christ ([John 19:15](#)).

When commanded not to speak to “any man in this **name**,” Peter and John responded, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” ([Acts 4:17–20](#)). The proclamation that “Jesus is Lord” ([1 Cor. 12:3](#)) and “that there is another king, Jesus” ([Acts 17:7](#)) was a religious and political affront to those in power throughout the Roman Empire. Such proclamations were acts “contrary to Caesar” (17:7) and “against this holy place [i.e., the temple] and this law” (6:13).

These passages fit together nicely since true redemption comes, not from Rome or earthly Jerusalem, but from where “the Lamb was standing,” that is, on Mount Zion. The writer of Hebrews describes Mt. Zion’s location: “You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels” ([Heb. 12:22](#)).

Revelation 13 and 14 contrast two ways of salvation: access to the temple through the mark, name, or number of the Beast ([Rev. 13:16–17](#)) or through the name of the Lamb “having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads” (14:1). Those who were circumcised only in their flesh followed the Beast, while those circumcised in the heart followed the Lamb.

The book of Revelation ends with the following:

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on [ἐν] their foreheads” (22:3–4).

While those opposed to Christ governed access to the earthly temple over which the two beasts conspired to resist the things of Christ and His church, John pointed believers to “the heavenly Jerusalem.” In order to have access to the “Jerusalem above” ([Gal. 4:26](#)), a person

must have the name of the Lamb and His father written on their forehead that can only be read by God who “sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge” ([2 Cor. 1:22](#)). Contrast this with earthly Jerusalem in the first century, which Paul describes as “present Jerusalem,” which “is in slavery with her children” (4:25). Those who continued to look to “present Jerusalem” for salvation were given the mark of a slave, “the mark of the beast.”

This interpretation is most likely new for you. It was for me when I first heard it explained. That’s OK. I believe it makes more sense than trying to fit the book of Revelation into a modern-day technological society.

Here’s the question: Can we derive any modern-day application from a prophecy that has already been fulfilled? Absolutely, any type of control and marking to identify people for whatever “good” reason, especially when it’s done by a government or religion (Islam) is evil. All fulfilled prophecy still has application for us today in the same way biblical history does.



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