

The False Prophet

Revelation 13:11-18



The False Prophet
Revelation 13:11-18

If I had to pick one word to describe the most effective device of the Devil in building his empire, I would pick the word deception. Our Lord Himself tells us in John 8:44, “He is a liar and the father of liars,” and in Revelation 13 we see his masterpiece of deception put on full display through the antichrist (the sea beast) and the false prophet (the earth beast).

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Revelation 13:11–12 (CSB) Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf and compels the earth and those who live on it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

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Revelation 13:13–14 (CSB) It also performs great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in front of people. It deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs that it is permitted to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

Revelation 13:15–16 (CSB) It was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And it makes everyone—small and great, rich and poor, free and slave—to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead,

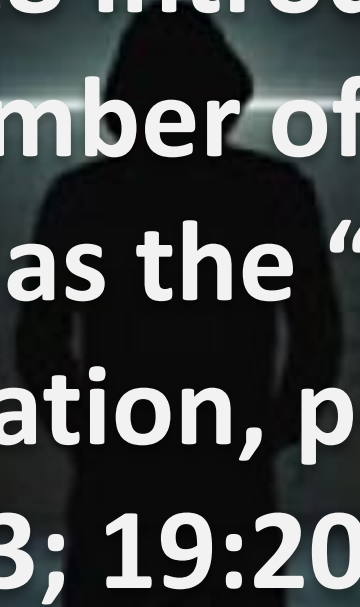
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Revelation 13:17–18 (CSB) so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark: the beast's name or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is 666.

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Revelation 13:11–18 introduces the second beast, the final member of the unholy trinity. This beast appears as the “false prophet” elsewhere in Revelation, pointing to its religious role (16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

A silhouette of a person wearing a hoodie, standing with their back to the camera. The person is centered in the background, with a faint light source behind them creating a glow. The overall background is dark and textured.

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The first beast gains control by parodying Christ's death and resurrection but in a far more public forum. When he returns from the dead, his associate, the false prophet, will use the event to forge a new world religion with the beast, and behind him the dragon (13:3-4,12), as its focus.

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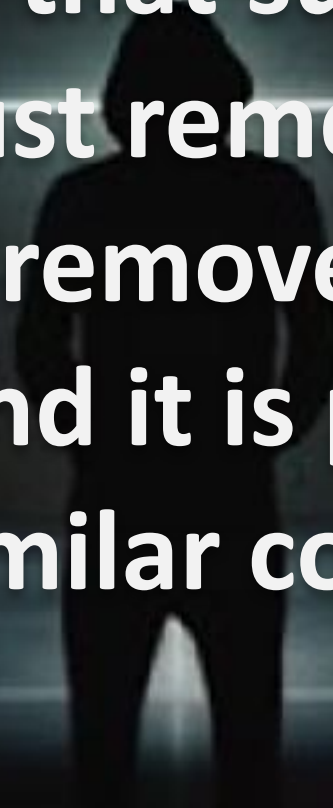
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The passage describes the final “tribulation period” of history, when the beast/antichrist comes to power and the second beast/false prophet becomes the prime minister, or high priest, of the evil empire, forcing the world to make a choice between Christ and the beast.

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While at the present period in history it seems unthinkable that such a state of affairs could occur, we must remember that we are only seventy years removed from the rise of Hitler and Stalin, and it is pure arrogance to think something similar could not happen again.



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If anyone could solve the terrorist crisis, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the unrest in Africa and bring peace to our troubled world, people would rush to worship such a person.



Mounce summarizes the workings of this evil triad: “As Christ received authority from the Father (Matt. 11:27), so Antichrist receives authority from the dragon (Rev. 13:4); and as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:14), so the false prophet glorifies the Antichrist (Rev. 13:12).”¹ The beast from the earth uses religious deception to coerce people into false worship.

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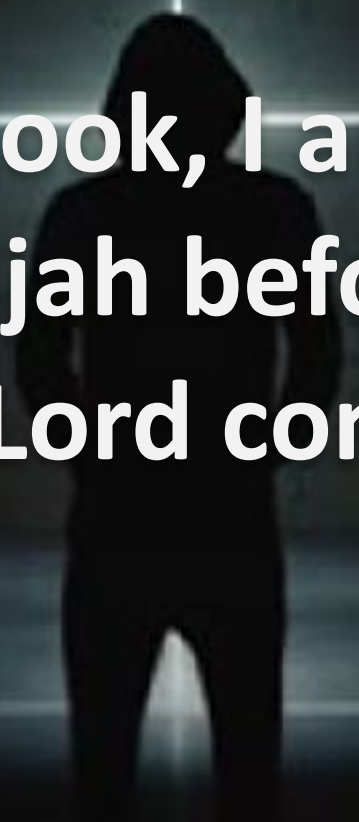
So as we navigate verses 11-18, we will discover that it will be through the instrumentality of this second beast empowered by Satan that a one-world government, one-world religion, and one-world economy will come to fruition. Humanity will willingly submit to it.

This individual called the false prophet will be given power by Satan to perform miracles (13:12-15). He will apparently duplicate the miracles of that one who comes in the spirit of Elijah (13:13; see 11:5-6), perhaps deceiving the world into believing that he is the one who fulfills the prophecy of Malachi 4:5.

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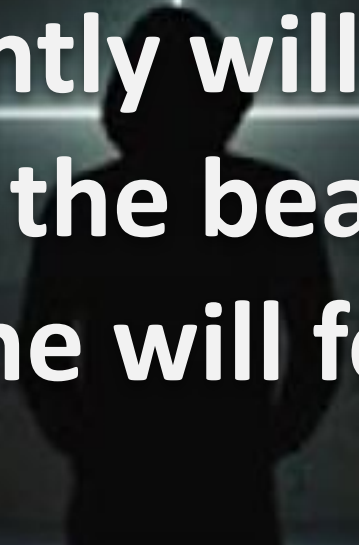
Malachi 4:5 (CSB) Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.



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Further, he apparently will cause some type of lifeless image of the beast to come alive and to speak, and he will force the world to worship it.



Paul pointed out in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 that during the tribulation, the Day of the Lord, God will send the world a powerful delusion so that they should believe the lie. Many believe the lie is that antichrist, who will rule over a one-world government, one-world religion, and one-world economy, is actually the world's messiah, the world's god.

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Walking through these eight verses, we discover seven defining characteristics of the antichrist's "minister of propaganda." These are valuable lessons for every generation of Christians who encounter false messiahs and false prophets and false teachings.

Revelation 13:11 (CSB) Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.

John sees another beast of the same sort as the first. He comes up out of the earth. Some believe this refers to the land of Israel and means the false prophet will be a Jew.

Revelation 13:11 (CSB) Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.

Others say the earth is a reference to the abyss. The difference in origin from the first beast may be intended to help us distinguish the two beasts from each other.

Revelation 13:11 (CSB) Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.

It is also possible that the earth, in contrast to the turmoil of the sea, implies the false prophet is calmer, more peaceful, and subtler than the antichrist. Like a lamb, he has the appearance of a friend.

Revelation 13:11 (CSB) Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.

We read in Job about Leviathan, the sea monster, and Behemoth, the land monster (e.g., Job 40:15–41:34). Also, in Daniel 7:3 we hear about four beasts that arise from the sea, and later in 7:17, about four beasts that arise from the earth.

Revelation 13:11 (CSB) ...it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.

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Against these possible backgrounds, John describes a beast that looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon, reminding us that appearances can be deceiving (Matt. 7:15–20). In truth, this beast is allied with Satan and promotes the worship of the first beast.

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Revelation 13:11 (CSB) ...**it had two horns like a lamb**, but it spoke like a dragon.

He has “**two horns like a lamb.**” The two horns signify strength but not great strength. The antichrist is powerful with 10 horns (13:1). The false prophet is one with much less strength.

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Revelation 13:11 (CSB) ...it had two horns **like a lamb**, but it spoke like a dragon.

And he has the appearance of **a lamb**. The word “lamb” appears 29 times in Revelation. Twenty-eight of those times it refers to Jesus. This is the one time it refers to someone or something else.

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Revelation 13:11 (CSB)...it had two horns **like a lamb**, but it spoke like a dragon.

Matthew 7:15 (CSB)“ Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.

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Revelation 13:11 (CSB) ...it had two horns like a lamb, but **it spoke like a dragon.**

This is not the roar of an intimidating dragon but the beguiling, deceitful, and deceptive speech of the serpent who deceived Adam and Eve in the garden (Mounce, Revelation, 256)

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Because of its religious role (i.e., the “false prophet” in 16:13; 19:20; 20:10), the second beast represents pagan religious power in service of wicked political/military/economic power structures and their leaders.

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In the first century, this beast would call to mind the priesthood of the imperial cult, a religious system promoting the worship of the emperor and other pagan deities.



By the end of the first century, there were temples dedicated to the worship of the Roman emperor as a god in all seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2–3. Such pagan religious power appears throughout church history and could certainly be embodied in a single religious leader at the end of the age promoting the worship of the antichrist.



The authority and role of the second beast may be compared to the imperial priesthood that operated in the Roman Empire. Because proper worship of the gods, including the deified emperors, was so important, priests occupied positions of importance and had great influence. Shown here is the sculpted head of an imperial priest from the first century AD.

Revelation 13:12 (CSB) It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf and compels the earth and those who live on it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

The false prophet is empowered by Satan and loyal to the antichrist. With delegated authority, he is the representative of the beast. He is his witness and advocate.

Here is the establishment of false religion on a worldwide scale. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Animists, etc.—all persons of faith will join hands and heart in worship, praise, and adoration of the antichrist. No doubt each faith will retain certain particular emphases that characterize their faith, but they will—they must—unite in their devotion and dedication to the beast.

Revelation 13:13 (CSB) It also performs great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in front of people.

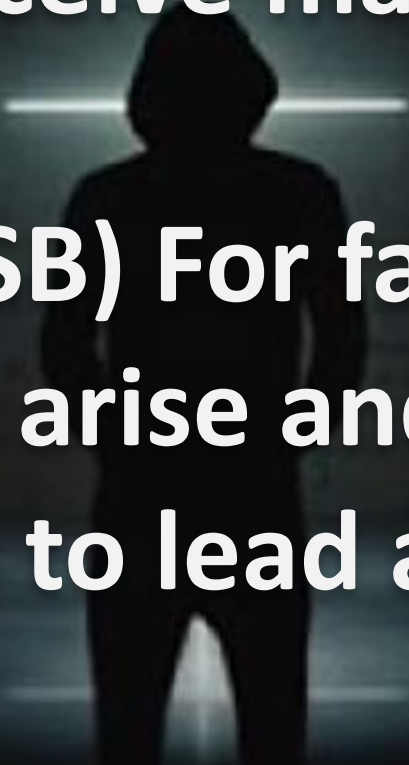
Jesus and his apostles predict that false prophets will come on the scene attempting to deceive many through signs and wonders (e.g., Matt. 7:15; 24:11, 24; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 John 4:1–3).

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Matthew 24:11 (CSB) Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

Matthew 24:24 (CSB) For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

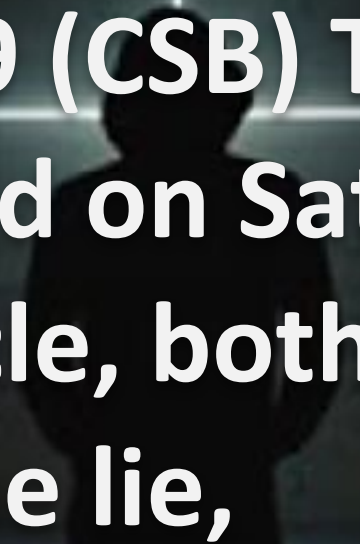
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2 Thessalonians 2:9 (CSB) The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working, with every kind of miracle, both signs and wonders serving the lie,



1 John 4:1–3 (CSB) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world.

Revelation 13:13 (CSB) It also performs great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in front of people.

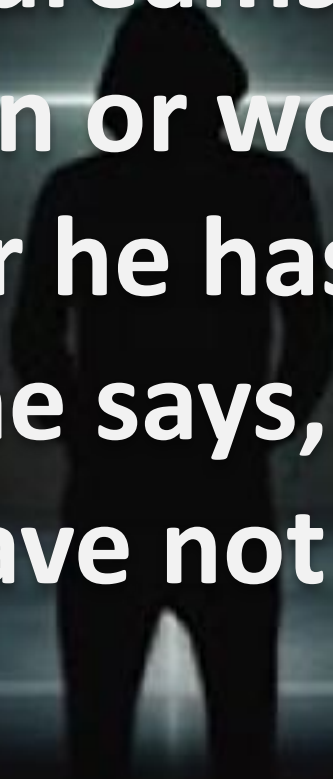
One specific sign miracle he performs is “causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in front of people.” Here he duplicates the miracle of Elijah (1 Kgs 18:28; see Mal 3:5-6) and the two witnesses (Rev 11:5).

These public demonstrations of power are part of a massive propaganda campaign to deceive people into worshiping the first beast. Believers are repeatedly warned in the Scriptures about the combination of miracles and deceit, about mighty works that direct people's allegiance away from the true God (e.g., Deut. 13:1–4; Ezek. 13:1–23).

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Deuteronomy 13:1–2 (CSB) “If a prophet or someone who has dreams arises among you and proclaims a sign or wonder to you, and that sign or wonder he has promised you comes about, but he says, ‘Let’s follow other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let’s worship them,’

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Deuteronomy 13:3–4 (CSB) do not listen to that prophet's words or to that dreamer. For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul. You must follow the Lord your God and fear him. You must keep his commands and listen to him; you must worship him and remain faithful to him.

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Revelation 13:14 (CSB) It deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs that it is permitted to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

Revelation 13:14 (CSB) ...telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

Like Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, a great idol will be erected, this time to honor and worship antichrist.

Revelation 13:14 (CSB) ...telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

This will take place probably near the midpoint of the tribulation, possibly in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:2-12).

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Statues and images of Roman emperors were common throughout Asia, including a statue of Domitian (or perhaps Titus) standing almost twenty-five feet tall in a temple in Ephesus.



Revelation 13:15 (CSB) It was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The second beast (as the unholy counterpart to the Holy Spirit) is allowed to breathe life into the image, causing it to speak.

Revelation 13:15 (CSB) It was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The second beast (as the unholy counterpart to the Holy Spirit) is allowed to breathe life into the image, causing it to speak.

The use of magic and sorcery to animate idols was common in the ancient world, and the result here is that the demonic idol demands worship on penalty of death (cf. 16:14; 19:20). Christians may either give allegiance to false gods and “live” or stay faithful to Christ with the real possibility of physical death.

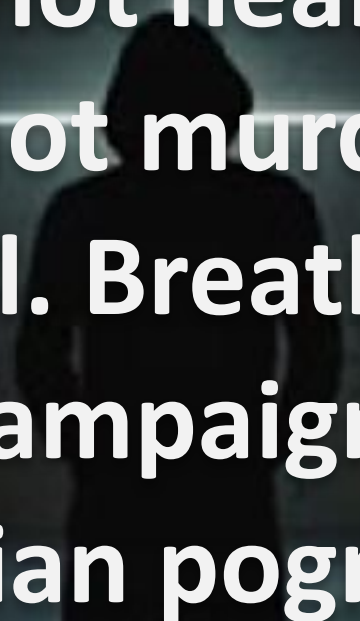
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Some believe this is trickery that uses ventriloquism to make it seem like the image comes to life. Others believe that through Satanic and demonic enablement, the statue will come to life and speak (Grant Osborne, Revelation, 515–16).

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Idols normally cannot hear or speak, walk or see. They also do not murder. However, this is not a normal idol. Breathing and talking, it goes on a vicious campaign, a Christian holocaust, a Christian pogrom.



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Revelation 13:16–17 (CSB) And it makes everyone—small and great, rich and poor, free and slave—to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark: the beast’s name or the number of its name.

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The second beast forces everyone to receive the “mark” (charagma) of the first beast on their right hand or forehead if they want to buy and sell. Most significantly, the beast’s mark serves as a parody of God’s sealing of his saints (Rev. 7:3–4; 22:4).


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Both the mark of the beast and the seal of the living God represent ownership and loyalty. The penalty of economic persecution points to the power and influence of trade guilds in the first century, organizations that, among other things, promoted worship of patron deities and the Roman emperor.

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David Platt is right: “Mark it down: there will always be a price to pay for believers who do not worship the idols of this world. Life will not be easy in this world when you fight the idolatry of this world, plain and simple” (“Fighting”).



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Revelation 13:18 (CSB) This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is 666.

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The mark is defined as the name of the (first) beast or the number of its name (i.e., 666). There may be more proposals for the meaning of 666 than there are verses in Revelation.

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The 666 of verse 18 has given us various identifications of the antichrist:

- **From ancient times it was said to be the Roman emperor, Nero Caesar particularly, and his priest who enforced caesar worship.**

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- From modern times some say Ronald Wilson Reagan.
- Some saw the mark in Social Security cards; others in credit cards.
- Still others identified it with the coming of computers.
- Some have noted that taxi license plates in Israel begin with 666.

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- Of course many during the time of the Reformation were certain the “mark of the beast” involved being a follower of the pope and the Roman Catholic Church.
- Still others spiritualize both beasts seeing the first as representing evil political power and the second representing evil religious power wedded to the first.

The Mark of the Beast

Revelation refers to the “mark of the beast” seven times (Rev. 13:16, 17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4; cf. Acts 17:29). The word for “mark” (charagma) was used for the emperor’s seal on official documents and the stamp of his head on Roman coins, and denoted qualities such as ownership, identification, and loyalty.

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The mark of the beast is connected to both the name of the beast (13:17; 14:11; 15:2) and the worship of the beast (14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20), and stands in direct contrast to the seal of God and the Lamb.

Since God and the forces of evil are at war and there is no neutral ground, every person receives either the beast's mark or God's seal. Both stamps of ownership are placed on the hand and/or forehead, symbolizing commitment and allegiance demonstrated through thinking and actions (7:3; 9:4; 13:16; 14:1, 9; 20:4; 22:4; cf. Ezek. 9:4, 6).

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In addition, since the mark of the beast and the seal of God are parallel stamps, both should be understood figuratively (i.e., the seal of God is not stamped on the foreheads and hands of all Christians).


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Both marks portray a person's commitments and loyalties reflected in their ethical choices and objects of worship. The mark is always deliberately received in Revelation (i.e., the object of some verb such as "receive" or "take") and cannot be obtained by accident.

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Those who refuse to worship the beast and take its mark will face persecution (e.g., 13:7, 10, 15, 17), while those who compromise and take the mark will experience the wrath of God (14:9–11; 16:2; 19:20).



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The Greek word that describes the “mark” that people are forced to receive on their forehead or right hand is the same as the word used to describe the imprint of the emperor’s head on Roman coins. At the time John receives his vision, Domitian is likely the Roman emperor in power (AD 81–96). Shown here is a coin stamped with a portrait of Domitian.



Most commentators appeal to the Jewish practice of gematria, which calculates the numerical value of words by assigning numbers to certain letters. Using this method, the leading possibility is “Nero Caesar,” whose name equals 666 when the final “n” is added (Neron) and the name is translated into Hebrew: N R O N Q S R (N = 50, R = 200, O = 6, N = 50, Q = 100, S = 60, R = 200).

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To identify the beast with Nero is not to exclude the possibility of future beasts and a final eschatological beast or antichrist. The use of gematria, however, is not without its problems (e.g., the need to translate into Hebrew), and speculation seems counterproductive.

Since numbers are consistently used to symbolize spiritual realities in Revelation, the primary importance of 666 may be that it falls short of the trinity of perfection (777) or that it pales in comparison to the number of “Jesus”—888 (I = 10, H = 8, S = 200, O = 70, U = 400, S = 200). In other words, the beast is a complete failure.

The beast is the greatest man but still a man. He is a six, not a seven. He, along with Satan and the false prophet, is a 666, a trinity of imperfection. Not now or ever will they be a 777! He is the best man can produce, but he is still just a man! He is “the completeness of sinful incompleteness,” the ultimate in “coming up short.” He is good enough to deceive many, but he is nowhere close to good enough to displace Jesus (Beale, “Number of the Beast”). Danny Akin

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Modern Applications

A silhouette of a person wearing a hoodie, standing with their hands in their pockets. Behind them is a glowing white cross. The background is dark with some faint, horizontal light streaks.

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Modern Applications

1. Heed the Warning of False Religion

This passage warns of the power of false religion. The Scriptures prohibit the worship of anything that is not God (e.g., human-made images, creation, secular authorities, human philosophies, pagan deities). It's important to remember that not all religious movements or religious leaders are sent from God; some originate with Satan.

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What's more, as we have studied tonight, we are consistently warned that miraculous signs and wonders do not guarantee the truth of the message or the character of the messenger (e.g., Jer. 23:16; 29:8–9; Mic. 3:11; Matt. 24:24).

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False religion degrades and devalues people by cheapening their worth. It also fails to provide salvation or sustain people during difficult times. In the end, false religion always fails its worshipers because it encourages rebellion against God, which leads to spiritual slavery and death.

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Modern Applications

1. Heed the Warning of False Religion
2. Hold faithfully to Jesus

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**We need courage to suffer economic
persecution in order to stay faithful to Jesus.**



Interestingly, although the second beast serves as a minister of religious propaganda, it all comes down to money. For Christians to stay faithful then, now, and in the future means we need a clear conviction that human beings are made in the image of God and cannot be reduced to commodities (e.g., 13:17; 18:13).

This passage presents yet another biblical opportunity to inspect our own lives for signs of idolatry. Many American Christians are content to engage in all manner of religious activities (e.g., Bible study, corporate worship, community groups) so long as it doesn't interfere with their affluent lifestyle. Are we willing to suffer financially for the cause of Christ?

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Modern Applications

1. Heed the Warning of False Religion
2. Hold faithfully to Jesus
3. Honor the value of discernment

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We need to walk wisely and exercise discernment. Perhaps most importantly, this text calls Christians to a life of discernment about what is good and what is evil.



Some believers are incredibly naive about spiritual powers and their influence on cultural institutions and ideologies (e.g., the power of social media to corrupt as well as facilitate communication). Without retreating in fear or hiding in a Christian subculture, we need to engage the world with both shrewdness and innocence (Matt. 10:16).

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The churches of Revelation considered the teachings of Jezebel, the Nicolaitans, and the Balaamites persuasive and apparently benign, but Jesus characterizes them as deadly. Are we educating people in the church to be truly discerning about what is good and what is evil?

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Key Themes of Revelation 13:11–18

- When political, military, economic, and religious powers unite in opposition to God, believers should prepare to suffer.
- Not all religious movements or leaders are sent from God; some originate with Satan.

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Key Themes of Revelation 13:11–18

- Religious leaders inspired by Satan will sometimes perform miraculous signs in order to deceive people.
- Believers need discernment and courage when facing programs of deceitful religious propaganda.

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OLD TESTAMENT CONNECTIONS

A silhouette of a person wearing a hooded sweatshirt, standing with their back to the viewer. Behind the person is a glowing white cross. The background is dark with some faint horizontal light streaks.

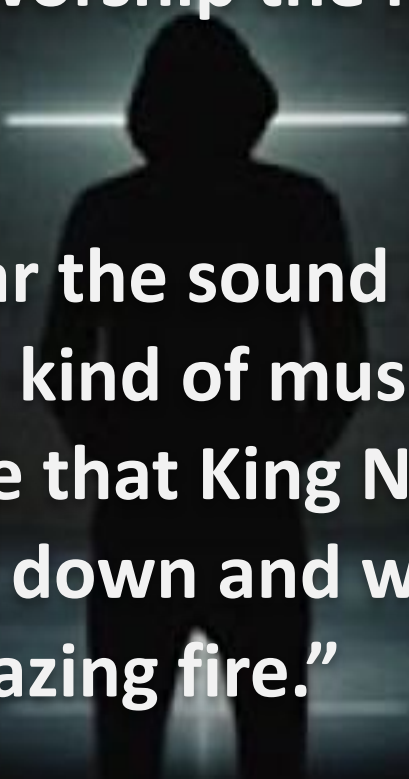
Revelation 13:14 It deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs that it is permitted to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

Deuteronomy 13:2–4 and that sign or wonder he has promised you comes about, but he says, ‘Let’s follow other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let’s worship them,’ 3do not listen to that prophet’s words or to that dreamer. For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul. 4You must follow the Lord your God and fear him. You must keep his commands and listen to him; you must worship him and remain faithful to him.

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Revelation 13:15 It was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Daniel 3:5–6 When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, you are to fall facedown and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. **6**But whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.”



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A silhouette of a person wearing a hoodie, standing with their back to the viewer. Behind the person is a glowing white cross. The background is dark with some faint horizontal lines.

CONCLUSION

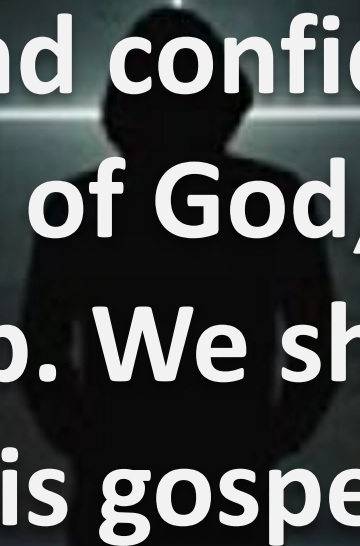
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Some people put their trust in government. Some people put their trust in money and the economy. Many people put their trust in religion. The Bible teaches that none of these will meet your expectations. None of these is the answer.

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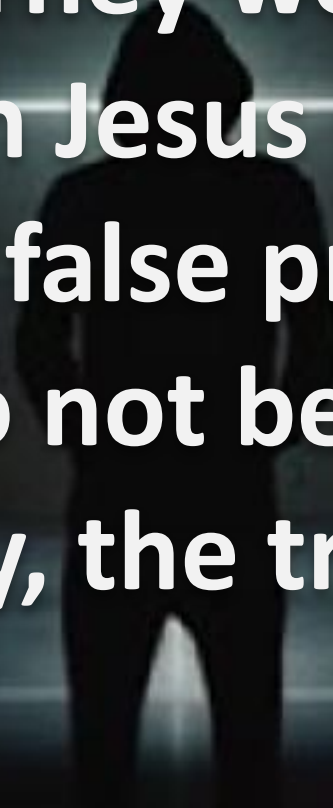
Rather, our faith and confidence should be put in the kingdom of God, a bloody cross, and an empty tomb. We should put our trust in King Jesus and His gospel.



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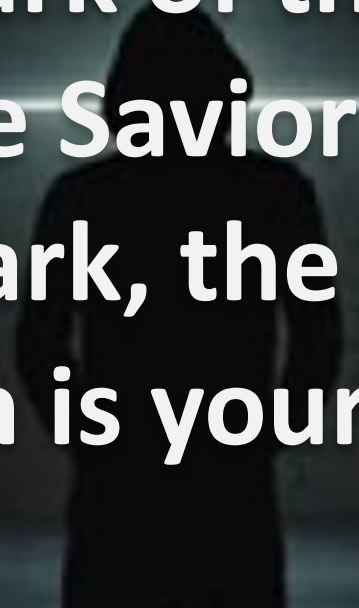
Tragically, the world would rather believe a lie than the truth. They would rather align with antichrist than Jesus Christ. They are quicker to follow a false prophet than a true prophet of God. Do not be deceived! Follow Him who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).



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Do not seek the mark of the beast. Seek to have the seal of the Savior of all men. Seek to bear the true mark, the mark of Jesus Christ. The decision is yours, and it is an important one.



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