

The Beast and the Mark

A beast rises from the sea, receiving power from the dragon. Another beast performs signs and compels all people to worship the first beast and receive its mark.

Revelation 13:1-18

CHARACTERS: The beast from the sea, The beast from the earth, Those who refuse the mark

THEMES: False worship, Persecution, Faithfulness, Spiritual discernment

JOHN STOOD ON the sand of the sea and saw a beast rising out of the water. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. The beast resembled a leopard but had feet like a bear's and a mouth like a lion's. The dragon gave it his power, his throne, and great authority.

One of the beast's heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed. The whole earth marveled and followed the beast, worshiping the dragon who had given authority to the beast, and worshiping the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?'

The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, blaspheming His name and His dwelling, and it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. Authority was given it over every tribe, people, language, and nation, and all who dwell on earth would worship it—everyone whose name had not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

'Let anyone who has ears to hear, listen,' John wrote. 'If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.'

Then another beast rose out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb but spoke like a dragon. It exercised all the authority of the first beast and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast. It performed great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people. By the signs it was allowed to work, it deceived those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

It was allowed to give breath to the image so that the image could even speak and cause those who would not worship it to be slain. It forced all people—small and great, rich and poor, free and slave—to receive a mark on their right hand or forehead. No one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, the name of the beast, or the number of its name.

'This calls for wisdom,' John wrote. 'Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.'

This vision revealed the ultimate choice: worship the beast and take its mark, receiving temporary security but eternal judgment, or refuse the mark, facing persecution and death but receiving eternal life through faithfulness to the Lamb.