

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Revelation 13, 18 (read 13:11-12, 15-18) “Signs of the End Times: Mandates and Money”

Intro. One time some religious leaders came to Jesus asking for a sign from heaven, evidently to prove His authority from God. Jesus pointed out that they observed signs in the sky to predict the weather. Then he said in Matthew 16:13, “... Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.”

Just as there were signs pointing to the first coming of Jesus, even so there will be signs pointing to the return of Jesus. I believe that believers have the opportunity and responsibility to know and recognize the signs of the times when they appear. Though the Lord’s coming will be like a thief in the night to unbelievers, 1 Thess. 5:4 says, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.”

So tonight we are going to explore two other key signs from the book of Revelation that demonstrate that we could be getting close to the return of Christ. I believe we are living in the days when the events of Revelation could be fulfilled. That is exciting when you realize that the coming of Christ could be very near. Four times in this book Jesus said, “I am coming quickly” (3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). I say with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (22:20).

The first sign we will look at tonight is:

I. THE PRACTICE OF UNIVERSAL MANDATES

We have two examples of universal mandates here in chapter 13. First of all, John says in v.16, “He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads.” Our text reveals that there will be in the end times a universal mandate for all to receive the mark of the beast. There are no exceptions. This phrase, “the mark of the beast” is used 8 times, and only in Revelation, so it is very important. Worse than that, we see the ultimate mandate in the last of v.15, which says that the beast will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” In other words, worship and express loyalty to the antichrist or die! That’s a mandate!

Who is the beast of this prophecy? In chapter 13 there are actually two beasts. One is the antichrist, a dynamic political leader that shall arise, who will form an alliance of nations. We read about him in vv.1-8. He will be proclaimed and viewed as a savior of the world, who will appear to be able to solve the major problems the world is facing. He is the devil’s counterfeit Christ. The second beast is spoken of in our opening text. He is antichrist’s sidekick. He doesn’t look like a beast. He is a religious leader who unites false religion to support the antichrist. They will form a diabolical duo who will defy the God of heaven and deceive the masses of mankind.

I find it interesting that these leaders are likened unto beasts. Notice this description of the antichrist in vv.1-2. What a beast! This is not a new comparison. In Daniel’s prophecies powerful political leaders are also likened unto vicious, bloodthirsty beasts. People are fools to believe that if you give political leaders great power, they will use that power for the good of the people. No, they will use that power to fulfill their lust for more power, wealth, pleasure and adulation. Our American founding fathers understood this, and they wisely established a system of government that would limit the power of our leaders. They establish three coequal branches of the federal government and the Constitution gives all powers to the states that are not spelled

out in the Constitution. Yet the pandemic is being used as an excuse to ignore these constitutional provisions in favor of authoritarian rule by the executive branch.

So one of the signs of the times is a growing acceptance for universal mandates that will lead to the ultimate universal mandates described in vv.15-16. I heard an Australian health official (Dr. Kerry Chant) actually say that their mandates were in keeping with the “New World Order.” Tonight, our focus from chapter 13 will be upon the mandate to receive the mark of the beast. Now let’s see first of all:

A. The Nature of the Mark – The word (*charagma*) is based on a Greek word for a sharp instrument (*charax*) that would be used to make the mark. In fact, in Acts 17:29 the word is translated “graven.” So I believe that the mark of the beast may be engraved into the skin by some high tech instrument, like a tattoo, which in biblical days was made with a pigment that was inserted into the layer of the skin using a multi-needle tattoo tool. On the other hand, it may be a micro-computer chip implanted under the skin using a sharp instrument. The technology already exists for this. One example is the VeriChip, a radio frequency identification device that can be scanned with a special reader device. The FDA approved the VeriChip implant for medical use in humans back in 2004.

But what is the nature of the mark in terms of its purpose? Well, I believe its purpose is two-fold.

1. Ownership and Allegiance - The word for “mark” was used for brands on animals. It was a mark of ownership. Furthermore, I find it interesting that the mark was used in Roman society by slaves wearing clay tablets to identify them and their owners (note the prophetic mark was to have “the antichrist’s name”-v.17). A permanent brand or tattoo on slaves was also a common practice,¹ engraved by means of a sharp instrument (*charax*). So it was a “badge of servitude.” However, in the last days this mark of loyalty and obedience will not be worn but implanted or engraved into the right hand or forehead (v.16).² So the antichrist and his false prophet will require a simple mark, partly as a token of allegiance, but in reality it will be the acceptance of servitude.

Even so, that is what the devil wants to do. He wants to own you, to enslave you. If you let him, he will get you so deeply into sin, or the occult, that he will have you for eternity. And the only One who can deliver you from the power of Satan is the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:13 says, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

2. Identification – Already, the vast majority of people on earth have been assigned some form of I.D. number. For a number a years now you have to get a Social Security number for your child 2 and up if you want to claim them as a dependent for your taxes. We are seeing today a move toward a more complete system of I.D. Ever since the September 11 attacks, there has been more talk of a national I.D. card for security reasons. Congress has already established the Real I.D. that will be required beginning in 2023 for airline travel, though I think a passport will still be acceptable. Now, with so much migration between countries, you can see how some would advocate for a universal I.D. We have millions of people pouring into

¹ Brands and tattoos were inflicted on slaves as a means of either marking human or divine ownership, or as a method of punishment for slaves who had already run away (<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/janeh-2015-0004/html>).

² It is also a counterfeit of what God has done and will do. In Rev. 7:3 & 14:1 we see that the servants of God will be sealed on their foreheads. Ex. 13:9 says, “It (observing the Passover with unleavened bread) shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.”

our country from all over the world and we do not know who many of these people are. And notice in v.16 that the mark will be on the forehead or hand. I.D. cards can be counterfeited or lost. With vaccine mandates coming on the scene, there is a concern about counterfeit vaccine cards, which have already made it onto the black market. A computer chip planted under the skin would help eliminate that problem, which could not only contain your personal I.D., but also whether you have had all the mandated vaccines or not.

I believe we can easily see why the mark of the beast would be on the back of the hand. That makes scanning easy. But why would the forehead be an alternate location? Facial biometric software now makes it possible to I.D. people by scanning a person's face or eyes. It is amazing how accurate this 2000-year-old prophecy is.

Next notice with me:

B. The Necessity of the Mark

1. It Will Be Universally Required – Again, v.16 says, “He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads.” Notice that there will be no exceptions. One goal of the antichrist is world domination and unity. In order to unite the world, everyone will be forced into the worship of one person, and everyone will be forced to accept the same mark. That conformity is so much the way of the world and the way of Satan. And so most all of the unregenerate of earth will line up to receive the brand of the beast in a universal display of solidarity. I can imagine the antichrist and other allied government leaders being shown on video getting their mark.

Now in order to achieve universal compliance, notice also:

2. It Will Be Economically Required – John says in v.17, “and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” The antichrist and the false prophet will use economic pressure to force everyone to accept this mark of the beast. This is very effective, isn't it? After all, people are highly motivated through economic pressure. For example, the Federal Government learned how to control the states a long time ago. Back in 1913 they started taxing the income of individuals. Then, money given to the states is conditioned upon the states doing what the Federal Government tells them to do. They began Medicare in 1965. They collect a modest Medicare tax, and as a result, all hospitals and doctors' offices that receive Medicare funds are under Federal control, and we have felt that reality during the pandemic like no other time. Even so, everyone who refuses the mark will be cut off from economic survival. They will be forbidden to buy or sell anything. Whether it be the industrialist trying to close a billion-dollar international deal, or the child buying an ice cream cone at the corner store, the rule will be: no seal, no sale! A president of a college in Istanbul said, “You cannot understand and you cannot know that the most terrible instrument of persecution ever devised is an innocent ration card.... If they please, you can be starved to death, and if they please, you can be dispossessed of everything you have; for you cannot trade, and you cannot buy and you cannot sell, without permission.” Indeed, another purpose of the mark is to ration limited goods and supplies, including gasoline, especially in light of the shortages described in 6:6.

This demand of the antichrist implies the formation of a worldwide economic system. The Internet has made this a reality. World political and business leaders have been developing a worldwide economic system for some time now. Gorbachev said in 1991, “Military security might be assured through economic interdependence that makes confrontation unprofitable. Political union and peace can be achieved through economic interdependence.” We have recently seen the results of our dependence upon trade with China and other countries. If China invaded Taiwan, how could we go to war against them when our economy is so dependent upon them?

United Europe now has a common currency, which is another step in the direction of economic unity.

Keep in mind that the mark of the beast contains a number. There is already economic pressure for everyone to receive a I. D. number. Back in the early 90's the I.R.S. enacted a new regulation stating that you cannot claim an exemption on your tax form for a child over age 2 unless you get a S.S.# for the child and you report it. So they are already using economic pressure to get people to get the number. I'm not saying that it is wrong for a person to have a Social Security number. I do not believe it is the mark of the beast. But that type of thing is *preparing* the world for the mark of the beast.

The fact that the mark of the beast will contain a number is why people will not be able to buy or sell without their I.D. number. I believe this already points to what we are already heading toward, and that is a cashless society. I am told that government leaders came out with a goal of a cashless society as far back as 1984. Consider this: If hard currency is no longer used, then the government has much greater control over economic transactions. Technology is already available to make the use of cash and checks obsolete. Most young adults rely mainly on electronic transactions. They hardly ever write a check. Not only is the banking industry in favor of this, but the I.R.S. is too. If they can force all transactions to be made electronically, then they can virtually eliminate billions of unreported income. If your payout exceeds your reported income plus loans, then they will know that you may be underreporting your income. As we move increasingly toward socialism, when the government provides cradle to grave benefits, the need for tax review will increase. A 2012 AARP bulletin pointed out that governments like this trend toward a cashless society because "some 25% of the world's circulating cash is used for illegal activities."³ Finally, have you noticed that the pandemic contributed to a reduction of cash transaction? Retailers claim they don't have enough coins and currency and they are asking you to pay by debit or credit card. The Mark of the Beast will probably be the means of eliminating cash altogether.

In March of 2020 Bitcoin.com reported that Microsoft has patented a new cryptocurrency system using body activity data. The patent describes a system where a device can verify whether "the body activity data satisfies one or more conditions set by the cryptocurrency system, and award cryptocurrency to the user whose body activity data is verified."⁴

We are already seeing society moving in the direction of universal mandates. A covid-19 vaccine mandate, though not yet universal, is being forced on government employees and contractors and employees that work in larger businesses. Basically, the mandate is saying you must get this vaccine or lose your job and ability to purchase food and other necessities for your family. The universality of the ultimate mandates of Revelation 13 is prefigured in the current mandate in that no exceptions are typically permitted. Even people who can prove they have antibodies from a previous Covid infection are required to submit or else. Yet a recent Israeli study has demonstrated that in reference to the Delta variant, natural, [God-given] immunity from a previous Covid infection is 27 times better than the immunity conferred by the vaccine! Furthermore, regular testing isn't even an option. Few medical or religious exemptions are being granted. The mandate of the mark of the beast will certainly not permit religious exemptions, even though the associated requirement to worship the antichrist or his image violates two of the most fundamental commandments for Christians and Jews, to not worship any other god and not to worship an image that represents any god. Now I want to make something clear: I do not believe that the Covid-19 vaccine is the mark of the beast. It is not my purpose to discuss the

³ *aarp Bulletin*, June 2012, p.43

⁴ <https://news.bitcoin.com/microsoft-cryptocurrency-system/>

merits of taking the vaccine or not taking it. I'm just saying that the increasingly universal mandate to get the vaccine and show visible proof is right in line of the direction we are heading according to this prophecy. It is a sign of the end times.

Now notice something else about this mark, and that is:

C. The Number of the Mark – The last of v.17 indicates that the mark of the beast will contain either the name of the beast or the number of the beast. The number of the beast is 666. One thing we know for sure about the number is this: six is the number of man. 6 falls short of God's perfect number 7. Whatever may be the deeper meaning of the number, it implies that this title referring to the first beast limits him to man's level which is far short of the deity of Jesus Christ.

I don't have time to go into how the numerical value of the name of the antichrist could add up to 666. My focus is to show how these prophecies could not have been fulfilled even 50 years ago. Yet they could be fulfilled in our day. It will take advanced and powerful computer technology to implement such a system. Our generation is the first generation that such a system could be implemented. Isn't it exciting to know that we could be very close to the return of Jesus!

If there is anyone who is hearing this message that is not yet a born-again Christian, I call upon you to be saved now or you may accept the mark of the Beast when that time come (2 Th. 2:9-12). The book of Revelation warns that for those who do, they will face God's wrath (16:2) and be condemned to hell forever (14:9-11).

Finally, another sign of the end times found in the book of Revelation are the prophecies concerning:

II. THE WORLD ECONOMY OF THE LAST DAYS

We have already addressed one aspect of the world economy in the last days from chapter 13, but now turn to chapter 18. In v.2 we read that a mighty angel proclaims "with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen..." This is not a prophecy that the ancient kingdom or city of Babylon will be rebuilt. Rather, it is a symbolic representation of the kingdom of the antichrist. This Babylon represents the social, cultural, political and economic life of the end times that is alienated from God. And just as Babylon was the capital of an empire, even so the empire of antichrist will have a capital city.

Yet here we get a glimpse of the economic aspects of that kingdom, and I believe you will see that such an economic system is at least ready to be implemented. Notice the characteristics of the economic system of the antichrist in the last days:

A. Political Leaders Will Be Enriched by the Antichrist – V.9 says, "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning." Here Babylon is personified as a woman, and political leaders have committed spiritual adultery with her. They will even reach the point of worshipping the antichrist instead of the one true God! It also says they "lived luxuriously with her." So one way that many will be seduced by this final Babylon will be the offer of wealth to those who support the antichrist. Indeed, most political leaders become very wealthy, especially those who are kings or dictators.

Yet even democratically elected leaders can become wealthy while in office. President Biden has been a senator most of his career. A senator currently makes \$174,000 per year, which is not that much. Yet his net worth is at least 9 million.

So since riches will be especially conferred to those who support the antichrist, it is not surprising that they will “weep and lament for her” upon seeing her destruction. The fall of Babylon is a sign of their loss of both political and economic power.

B. Big Business Will Form an Alliance with Antichrist – The last of v.3 says, “... the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” Satan and his antichrist will gain a more complete control of the economies of the nations, and if you support the antichrist, he will make it very profitable for you. The word translated “merchants” (*emporos*, vv.3, 11, 15, 23) especially refers to those who sell to or in other places rather than a local retailer with a store in a fixed location.⁵

So this is a prophecy of the marriage between big government and big business. Sound familiar? The pandemic has hurt small businesses but has helped the big retailers like Amazon, Walmart, and others, as well as big tech firms. Businesses have learned that there is an economic advantage for supporting the political party in power. On the other hand, if an individual, business, or nation does not support the antichrist, they will suffer economically, as we saw in chapter 13.

C. The Characteristics of End-Times Merchants –

1. Engage in National and International Trade – V.11 says, “And the merchants of the earth will weep ..., for no one buys their merchandise anymore.” The word translated “merchandise” (*gomos*) refers to merchandise conveyed in a ship. In fact, the last of v.17 says, “And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off.” Thus, the Bible predicts global, interdependent economies that rely on trade by means of cargo ships. Somehow, both business and government leaders have supported transforming our manufacturing economy to one that is dependent upon the importation of goods from China and other countries, which are imported on large cargo ships. These ships have been in the news lately due to the supply chain problems we are experiencing. Some of the larger ships can hold over 20,000 large shipping containers that can be unloaded at the seaport and moved by rail or by 18-wheel trucks.

2. They Become Rich – V.3 says, “the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” Likewise, v.15 says, “The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing.” Why are the weeping and wailing? V.17 says, “For in one hour such great riches came to nothing....” V.19 adds, “Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth!” Doesn’t that sound like today? Jeff Bezos’, founder of Amazon, his net worth soared to 171 billion in 2020.

3. They Become among the Great Men of the Earth – The middle of v.23 says, “For your merchants were the great men of the earth.” These wealthy merchants have become highly influential, not only in business but also in politics. Just think how influential Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook has become.

I hope no one here will sacrifice biblical and godly values just to obtain more wealth. You can’t take it with you when you die. Jesus said we should lay up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:20).

Finally, notice what this text says about:

⁵ Rev. 18:11 says, “And the merchants of the earth will weep ..., for no one buys their merchandise anymore.” The word translated “merchandise” (*gomos*) refers to merchandise conveyed in a ship.

D. God's Judgment Upon these Merchants – According to this prophecy in chapter 18, the entire kingdom of the antichrist will be destroyed, as well as those who make alliances with him. Verses 9 & 18 refer to “the smoke of her burning.” Of course, when that happens, all who made alliances with the antichrist will suffer. V.11 says, “And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore.” Ah, as the Bible says, you reap what you sow. They supported the antichrist and his false prophet, who mandated that you can't buy or sell without the mark of the beast. Now, no one buys from these merchants! As we see from other parts of Revelation, their judgment will be far worse than loss of business. The last of v.4 indicates that they will partake of the plagues of the wrath of God that are described in chapter 16.

In contrast, notice what v.4 also says, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.” Now there is a general principle here. It is not God's will for His people to partake of the judgment of ungodly. The angels had to remove Lot from Sodom, lest he shared in its judgment. Jesus warned believing Jews to flee from Jerusalem before its fall and destruction in 70 A.D. (Matt. 24:16). Even so, tribulation saints are warned to flee from the centers of the kingdom of antichrist, especially toward the end of the tribulation. However, I believe that the tribulation saints will be removed from the world before the final bowls of judgment described in chapter 16 are poured out, based on Matthew 24:31 and Rev. 14:14-16.

Conclusion: I believe all these signs point to the likelihood that Jesus is coming again, perhaps soon. While there is still time, let us strengthen our Christian lives and our church. Let us finish the missionary task the Lord has given us. Don't be sucked into the spiritual apostasy and rebellion of the last days. And if you are not yet a born-again Christian, you should be saved today, or you could reach the point when you will never be saved. May God help us all.

Sources: W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962-1966); George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972); Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973); Robert H. Mounce, *The New International Commentary, The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977)-chapt. 18 only; Paige Patterson, *The New American Commentary: Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2012)-chapt. 13 only; John Philips, *Exploring Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1974); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1966). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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