



THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Course 6, *New World Coming*, Lesson 5

The Problem: Revelation 13 presents one of the most sobering warnings in all of Scripture. It speaks of a time, just before the return of Christ, when a global power will attempt to force all people—*“small and great, rich and poor, free and slave”*—to receive a mark in their right hand or their forehead (Revelation 13:16–17). Those who refuse will face severe restrictions. Those who comply will face something far more serious: eternal loss.

In Revelation 14:9–10, Jesus gives a direct and urgent warning. Whoever *“worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark... shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God...”* This isn’t merely symbolic language—it describes the most decisive judgment in human history. To receive the mark of the beast is to reject God’s authority and forfeit eternal life. But Scripture also offers hope. Those who remain faithful to Christ—refusing to worship the beast, its image, or to receive its mark—are pictured standing victorious on the sea of glass (Revelation 15:2–3). By God’s grace, they have overcome. Their loyalty to Jesus is unshaken, and they are sealed by God Himself.

In the closing scenes of earth’s story, the world will be divided into just two groups: those who worship the Creator and keep His commandments, and those who follow the beast and yield to its counterfeit system. The choice is unavoidable. The consequences are eternal. That’s why we must understand—Who is the beast? What is its image? What is the mark? And how can we avoid receiving it? These questions are not sensational—they are spiritual. And the Bible does not leave them unanswered. Let us prayerfully open God’s Word to uncover the truth. The times we live in demand nothing less.

Objectives:

- I. We identify the earthly power symbolized by the beast in Revelation 13.
- II. We seek to understand the nature of the image to the beast and how it will arise.
- III. We discover the meaning of the mark of the beast—and how it contrasts with the seal of God.
- IV. We compare the beast’s claims with New Testament truth about God’s law and worship.
- V. We learn how to stand faithful to Christ and avoid receiving the mark.

I. WHAT EARTHLY POWER IS REPRESENTED BY THE BEAST

The beast is spoken of in Revelation 13:1-10. These verses give us seven characteristics of the beast that enable us to identify what earthly power is being referred to.

The Word

- 1. What inscription appeared on the heads of the first beast in Revelation 13:1, and what does it reveal about the character of this power (verses 5–6)?
- 2. Where did the beast receive its power, authority, and the central location of its rule? Revelation 13:2
- 3. For what set time did God allow the beast to function before it received a deadly wound? Revelation 13:3, 5
- 4. What kind of authority and influence does the first beast exercise, and how is its power received by the world? Revelation 13:4, 8

5. What does this beast power do to the faithful people of God? Revelation 13:7 (first part)
6. How extensive is the influence of the beast? Revelation 13:7 (last part)
7. What is the number of the beast, and how are believers called to understand its meaning? Revelation 13:18

Explanation: In Revelation 13, the apostle John sees a symbolic beast rising from the sea—a composite power marked by blasphemous claims, worldwide influence, and opposition to God’s faithful people. When the prophecy’s distinctive features are compared with the unfolding of events over time, they align unmistakably with the rise and development of the Roman Papal system. This conclusion is not a critique of sincere Catholic believers, many of whom love and follow Christ, but a careful analysis of an institution that gradually assumed roles and prerogatives the Bible assigns to God alone.

At the same time, Revelation’s warning transcends any single era. The symbols speak not only to the past but to ongoing spiritual realities: the merging of religious and civil power, the danger of replacing divine authority with human tradition, and the pressure to compromise conviction for acceptance. In every generation, these dynamics reappear in new forms—calling God’s people to faithfulness, discernment, and love-based obedience.

Understanding the Use of Historical Sources: This study examines official statements made by Roman Catholic leaders throughout history—such as popes, church councils, and catechisms—to demonstrate how their claims align with the prophetic descriptions found in Revelation 13 and Daniel 7. These references are not included to judge the personal faith or sincerity of individual Catholics. Rather, they help identify a religious system that, according to prophecy, gradually assumed authority God reserves for Himself. Bible prophecy often speaks in symbols to address movements, not individuals. Just as Jesus lovingly called all people to truth—including those within religious traditions of His own day—the call in Revelation is a call to *"come out"* (Revelation 18:4), not to condemn. This study is offered in the same spirit of truth-seeking, with Scripture as our guide.

Understanding the Beast: What the Bible Teaches About Earth’s Final Superpower:

1. *Blasphemy--Claiming Divine Authority.* According to Scripture, blasphemy includes two things: Claiming to be God (John 10:33) and claiming the power to forgive sins (Luke 5:21). Jesus could rightly do both—because He is God in human flesh. Jesus could rightly do both—because He is God in human flesh. But Scripture reserves this authority for no other human being. Yet throughout history, and still today, the Roman Papal system has asserted both claims:

- Historical Declarations
 - The *Council of Florence* (1439) affirmed the Pope as *"the true vicar of Christ and head of the entire Church."*
 - Pope Leo XIII declared in 1894: *"We hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty."*
- Modern Teachings
 - The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (para. 882) affirms the Pope’s role as *"supreme, full, immediate and universal power in the care of souls."*
 - In 2023, Catholic publications reiterated that priests act *in persona Christi*—in the person of Christ—when offering forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation. Based on John 20:23, this authority is understood to have been passed to the clergy by apostolic succession.

These claims align with the biblical definition of blasphemy—not as insult, but as **assuming divine roles** reserved for God alone. Scripture affirms that only God has the authority to forgive sins—*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us"** (1 John 1:9)—and declares, *"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake"* (Isaiah 43:25); to claim this power apart from God is to cross into the very definition of blasphemy. These claims also directly contradict Jesus’ teaching: *"Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven"* Matthew 23:9. The New Testament consistently presents Christ alone as the Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18). Thus, the Papacy fulfills the prophetic description of a power that speaks *"great things and blasphemies"* (Revelation 13:5–6).

2. *Receiving Power from Pagan Rome.* Revelation 13:2 says, “The dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.” Revelation 12 identifies the dragon as Satan (verse 9), but also as working through pagan Rome, which sought to destroy Christ at His birth (Revelation 12:4; Matthew 2:16). History confirms that the Papacy rose to prominence through the support of the Roman Empire.

In A.D. 330, Emperor Constantine moved the capital from Rome to Constantinople, leaving the Bishop of Rome in a position of growing influence. Historian Alexander Flick noted that the Bishop of Rome, “in the seat of the Caesars, was now the greatest man in the West.”

In A.D. 533, Emperor Justinian issued a decree recognizing the Pope as head of all churches. This decree became effective in A.D. 538, after the defeat of the Ostrogoths—marking the beginning of papal supremacy.

This transfer of civil and religious authority from pagan Rome to the Papacy fulfills the prophecy that the beast would receive its power and seat from the dragon.

3. *A Global Religious Influence (Revelation 13:3, 7–8).* “All the world wondered after the beast... and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.” This beast is not a minor power confined to one region or era. It commands worldwide attention and exerts influence over nations, languages, and people groups. Today, the Roman Papacy has diplomatic relations with nearly every nation and wields enormous religious and political influence across the globe. Its leader addresses world parliaments, participates in global summits, and presides as spiritual head over more than a billion adherents—making it the only religious institution that fulfills this prophecy with such global reach.

4. *A Wounded Head That Heals (Revelation 13:3).* “I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed.” In 1798, Napoleon’s general, Berthier, captured Pope Pius VI and exiled him, effectively ending papal political rule. Many thought the Papacy’s power had come to a permanent end. But in 1929, the Lateran Treaty between the Papacy and Mussolini restored the Vatican as a sovereign state, and papal influence has grown steadily since. This dramatic decline and resurgence precisely match the prophecy of a fatal wound that would be healed—and the world’s renewed admiration confirms it: “All the world wondered after the beast.”

5. *Persecution of God’s People (Revelation 13:7).* “It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them.” During the medieval period, the Papal Church sought to suppress dissent and heresy, often through inquisitions, forced conversions, and state-sanctioned persecution. Historians estimate that millions of people—including Bible-believing Christians, reformers, and others—suffered imprisonment, torture, or death for resisting papal authority. While many modern Catholic individuals and leaders advocate peace and tolerance today, the historical record fulfills the prophetic description of a system that waged war against God’s faithful followers.

6. *A Power That Claims to Change Divine Law (Daniel 7:25).* “He shall... think to change times and laws.” This links Revelation 13 with Daniel 7, where the same system is described as attempting to alter God’s law. The Catholic Church has openly claimed responsibility for changing the biblical day of worship from Saturday—the seventh day—to Sunday. Catholic catechisms teach that this change is a mark of Church authority. But the Bible never authorizes the change. In fact, the Sabbath commandment (Exodus 20:8–11) remains unaltered in Scripture and is still the only commandment that begins with the word “Remember.”

7. *A Number Associated with Its Authority (Revelation 13:18).* “Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.” In the Bible, the number seven often represents divine completeness or perfection. In contrast, the number six—falling short—symbolizes human imperfection or rebellion. Repeating it three times emphasizes a counterfeit trinity, suggesting a system that seeks to substitute human authority for God’s. Many Bible students have noted that a title long associated with the Papal office, Vicarius Filii Dei (“Vicar of the Son of God”), adds up to 666 when its letters are assigned Roman numeral values. While this isn’t the sole identifying feature, it aligns with broader prophetic clues—especially in connection with a religious power that claims divine prerogatives, speaks great things, and influences global worship (see Revelation 13:5–8).

Some scholars also propose that 666 refers to the Roman emperor Nero, arguing that the Hebrew spelling of “Neron Caesar” equals 666 using gematria (letter-number calculation). This view sees the beast as a symbol of first-century persecution. Yet Nero’s limited reign cannot account for the widespread authority, longevity, and spiritual deception portrayed in Revelation 13. He may serve as a type or early example, but the prophecy points to something far larger and enduring.

Ultimately, 666 is more than a number—it represents a system that replaces God’s authority with man-made tradition, offers a counterfeit to true worship, and leads the world to revere power rather than truth. It’s a final call for discernment, allegiance, and worship rooted in God’s Word.

II. WHAT IS THE IMAGE TO THE BEAST?

An image is a likeness or reflection of something else. In prophetic terms, the “image to the beast” represents a system that mirrors the characteristics of the original beast power. Just as the Papacy historically united with secular governments in Europe to enforce religious authority and suppress dissent, the image to the beast will be a modern church-state alliance that seeks to exercise similar control over individual conscience.

The Word:

8. What second beast did John see in Revelation 13:11–13, and how is it described as enforcing the worship of the first beast (the Papacy)?
9. What special work will this second power do? Revelation 13:14-15
10. What other name is given to this second beast? Revelation 16:13; 19:20

Explanation: Understanding the Second Beast in Revelation 13

1. *Emerging from the Earth.* The first beast of Revelation 13 rises out of the “sea” (verse 1), which symbolically represents “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (Revelation 17:15)—that is, densely populated regions such as Western Europe. Historically, the Papacy arose from these regions amidst the shifting tides of collapsing Roman power. In contrast, the second beast rises from the “earth” (verse 11), suggesting a region relatively unpopulated at the time of its emergence—a political power that develops in isolation from the traditional centers of European civilization.
2. *Two Horns Like a Lamb.* The second beast is described as having “two horns like a lamb” (Revelation 13:11). Unlike the horned beasts in Daniel, which typically represent kingdoms or ruling powers, these horns do not wear crowns—suggesting principles rather than monarchs. The lamb-like symbolism evokes gentleness, youthfulness, or even Christ-like values. Many interpreters see these horns as representing two foundational freedoms: civil liberty and religious liberty. They characterize a nation that, at its inception, upheld a separation of church and state and offered protection for both political and spiritual conscience.
3. *Speaking Like a Dragon.* Though the second beast begins with lamb-like characteristics, it eventually “*speaks as a dragon*”—a reference to Satan as depicted in Revelation 12. This implies a dramatic shift from freedom to coercion. A nation once dedicated to liberty will ultimately enforce false worship and suppress conscience.
4. *Timing: After the First Beast’s Wound (1798).* Revelation 13:12 indicates this power rises to prominence after the first beast (the Papacy) receives its “*deadly wound*” in 1798. This timeframe coincides with the emergence of the United States as a global power. Founded on ideals of liberty, the U.S. gradually rose to international influence during the exact period that papal civil authority was being suppressed.
5. *End-Time Influence and Prophetic Role.* Revelation portrays the U.S. as the dominant political and religious force in the closing scenes of Earth’s history. It will use its global influence to support and restore papal-style worship, coercing the world to follow the first beast. This will require a drastic shift in Protestant America—from its historic commitment to liberty—to a form of apostate religion united with state power.

6. *The False Prophet*. This second beast is later identified as the “*false prophet*” (Revelation 19:20). This isn’t an individual but a symbol of deceptive religious movements within the U.S. that will urge the government to enforce religious laws—including Sunday observance, consistent with the worship practices of the Papacy. In Revelation 16:13, this false prophet joins with the dragon (Satan) and the beast (Papacy) in a final effort to deceive the world.

Conclusion: The “*image to the beast*” represents apostate Protestantism in the United States, united with civil power to enforce a form of worship aligned with papal tradition rather than Scripture. This church-state union will mirror the medieval union of the Papacy and secular Europe—compelling worship, restricting liberty, and fulfilling prophecy. The image could also represent a mindset, an echo of empire in every age that demands worship, silences conscience, and punishes resistance.

III. WHAT IS THE MARK OF THE BEAST?

If the beast in Revelation represents the Papal system, then the “mark” must symbolize a distinctive sign of that system’s claimed authority—especially in contrast to the seal of God which we studied in the previous lesson.

The Word:

11. Which power enforces the mark of the beast on the world? Revelation 13:16
12. Where is this symbolic mark placed, and what might this represent? Revelation 13:16
13. In contrast, where is the seal of God placed? Revelation 7:3
14. What consequences are described for those who refuse the mark? Revelation 13:16

Explanation: Understanding the Mark of the Beast

1. Since Revelation is a book filled with symbolic prophecy, the mark of the beast should not be interpreted as a literal stamp or barcode. Rather, it represents a symbolic mark of allegiance—a visible expression of submission to Papal authority—adopted by those who accept the authority of the beast and its image.
2. The terms “right hand” and “forehead” indicate how the mark is received. Some individuals are mentally and spiritually convinced (forehead)—they sincerely believe in the system. Others may not fully agree, but yield outward compliance to avoid persecution or hardship (right hand). Revelation 13:15–17 warns of severe penalties for refusing this mark: economic restrictions and even capital punishment. Many will conform for survival, but by contrast, the seal of God is placed only in the forehead (Revelation 7:3)—signifying wholehearted, intelligent commitment to God’s truth.
3. In Revelation, there are only two end-time identifiers: the mark of the beast or the seal of God (see Revelation 13:16–18; 14:1–5; 7:1–3). Everyone will bear one or the other. The Bible clearly outlines the sign of allegiance to God: “My Sabbaths you shall keep... it is a sign between Me and you...” (Exodus 31:13–17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20). Faithful Sabbath observance is not legalism—it is a sign of sanctification and salvation by grace through faith in Christ (Revelation 14:7).
4. If the seal of God involves honoring the day He sanctified—the seventh-day Sabbath—then the mark of the beast must represent a human-devised substitute for divine authority. Sunday observance, introduced by the Church of Rome and adopted by most of Christendom, is widely acknowledged by Catholic sources as a symbol of the Church’s authority to define doctrine and practice. Catholic statements, both historical and modern, affirm this:
 - “The [Roman Catholic] Church changed the observance of the Sabbath to Sunday by right of the divine, infallible authority given to her by her founder, Jesus Christ.” —Empowermissions.org summary of Catholic statements

- The *Catholic News Agency* acknowledges: “It is true that the Catholic Church through the authority of Christ replaced the Hebrew Sabbath (Saturday) with the Lord’s Day (Sunday)... well before the time of Emperor Constantine.” —[The Sabbath or the Lord’s Day](#)
- The *Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (Rev. Peter Geiermann, 1946) states: “We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church... transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday... by the plenitude of that divine power which Jesus Christ bestowed upon Her.”

These statements echo earlier declarations:

- *The Question Box* by B.L. Conway: “If the Bible is the only guide for the Christian, then the Seventh-day Adventist is right... But Catholics learn what to believe and do ☐ from the divine, infallible authority... the Catholic Church.”
- *Canon and Tradition*, quoting the Archbishop of Reggio at the Council of Trent: “The Church had changed Sabbath into Sunday, not by command of Christ, but by its own authority.”
- *Catholic Mirror*, Sept. 23, 1893: “The Catholic Church... changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.”
- Letter from Chancellor for Cardinal Gibbons (1895): “The act [of changing the Sabbath] is a mark of her ecclesiastical authority in religious things.”

Conclusion: The mark of the beast represents forced allegiance to a system that substitutes human tradition for God’s law. Specifically, it refers to enforced Sunday observance—a sign of Papal authority—standing in opposition to the seventh-day Sabbath, which the Bible upholds as God’s enduring sign of loyalty and worship. In the final conflict, the choice will not be about days merely, but about authority, worship, and allegiance.

IV. WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK?

The Word:

15. What is the simple purpose of five of the first-day statements in the Gospels? What was the day before? Is there any suggestion of Sunday sacredness? Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1
16. Why were the disciples gathered together on the evening of resurrection Sunday? John 20:19
17. In the one mention of the first day of the week in the book of Acts, are we told that we should now substitute this day for the Sabbath? What are we told? Acts 20:7
18. Why did Paul instruct the Corinthians to put money aside on the first day of the week? 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Explanation: Does the New Testament establish Sunday as the new Sabbath?

The first five references to the first day of the week in the New Testament simply affirm one historical fact: Jesus rose from the dead on that day. It is presented as the day after the Sabbath, which the disciples continued to observe “according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56). Though the Gospels were written decades after the resurrection, none of them declare that the first day has become the new Sabbath, nor do they command believers to honor it as a memorial of the resurrection.

In John 20:19, the disciples are gathered “for fear of the Jews,” not for a worship service. The text gives no indication that Jesus or the disciples considered the first day a new holy day.

Acts 20:7 mentions a meeting for breaking bread on the first day, which likely occurred on what we now call Saturday night—since in Bible reckoning, days begin at sunset. But “breaking bread” was common among believers and took place daily (Acts 2:46), and Paul also preached on various days (e.g., Wednesday in Acts 20:15). These examples do not bestow sacred status on those days.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, Paul instructs believers to “lay by in store” on the first day—literally “by himself” (Greek: *par’ heauto*)—suggesting private setting-aside at home, not a public church offering. The text provides no indication that the first day was sanctified or intended for communal worship.

Conclusion: When Scripture is our only authority, we find no command or example in the New Testament elevating Sunday as a day of rest, worship, or memorial. Catholic writers have openly acknowledged this, stating that Sunday observance is based not on biblical command, but on the Church’s own authority. As such, the shift from the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday reflects a human alteration of divine law—a change the Papacy itself claims as a mark of its jurisdiction. In light of Revelation’s warnings, Sunday observance enforced by law becomes the mark of the beast—a symbol of allegiance to human authority over God’s Word.

V. HOW DO WE AVOID RECEIVING THE MARK OF THE BEAST?

The Bible assures us that those who live by faith in Jesus Christ will not be overcome by the beast. They will stand firm, rejecting both the image of the beast and its mark. These faithful ones receive the seal of the living God (Revelation 7:3) and are prepared to meet Jesus with joy at His return.

The Word:

19. What is characteristic of those who have rejected beast worship? Revelation 14:12

20. How do we keep the commandments of God? Romans 3:31; 8:3-4; 1 John 5:1-4, 16

Explanation: Living by Faith, Obeying in Love. Salvation is a gift—we are saved by God’s grace, made available to us through faith in Jesus Christ. But this grace is not passive; it is transforming power. When Christ dwells in our hearts through the Spirit, His grace shapes us into willing and joyful obedience. As Romans 8:4 declares, *“the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”*

This is the key to resisting the beast, its image, and its mark. It is not by human strength, but by living faith in Christ, that we are empowered to obey God’s law—not selectively, but fully. This includes the fourth commandment, which calls us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy (Exodus 20:8–11). Jesus affirmed the Sabbath in His end-time counsel (Matthew 24:20), and He invites us to obey not out of obligation, but love: *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* John 14:15.

As we walk in loving obedience, our hearts are guarded from deception. We are protected from the coercive powers of the false prophet and the beast. It is Christ—not fear—who rules in the heart of the believer.

So let me ask: Is Jesus Christ the Lord of your life? Are you willing to honor His day of rest—not to earn salvation, but because He has already saved you by grace? The Sabbath is not the cause of salvation; it is the evidence. It is God’s sign that He is sanctifying you and preparing you for His eternal kingdom.

Will you respond to His invitation today, and choose to honor Him by remembering His holy day?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The Bible teaches that Sunday is a memorial of Christ’s resurrection.
 - b. Jesus changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.
 - c. Christ’s followers kept the Sabbath after His death and resurrection.
 - d. Sunday observance is the mark of Papal authority.
2. Discussion: Many sincere Christians have worshiped on Sunday without understanding the significance of the seventh-day Sabbath. What does the Bible say about their standing before God? Key Scriptures:

- Acts 17:30 – *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”* What does this verse teach us about how God judges those who have not yet received light?

- James 4:17 – *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*

How does this deepen our understanding of personal responsibility once truth is known?

God judges us with perfect love and justice. The issue at the end of time will not simply be about a day—but about willing allegiance to divine truth. True worship is a matter of the heart, revealed in loving obedience to God’s commandments through living faith in Christ.

3. Further Reflection: Standing Faithful in Every Generation

While Revelation 13 identifies specific historical powers in the prophetic narrative, Scripture also warns about ongoing patterns of deception and coercion. In what ways might the principles represented by the “beast”—such as the union of religious authority with political coercion, or the suppression of conscience—manifest in unjust systems or ideologies throughout history and even today? How can believers discern and resist such influences in every generation? Though Revelation 13 outlines specific powers in prophecy, its warning reaches beyond one era or institution. In every age—including our own—believers are called to discern the spirit behind systems that suppress truth or seek to control conscience.

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God...” —1 John 4:1 According to 1 John 4:1, what responsibility do believers have when confronted with spiritual claims or religious authority? How does this help us recognize modern expressions of the beast’s principles?”

Just as the “beast” symbolizes religious-political coercion and counterfeit worship, its principles can manifest wherever truth is compromised for control. We are invited to live by the Spirit of Christ, grounded in His Word, loving truth more than tradition, and loyalty to God above human authority.

Are we prepared to recognize and resist such forces in our own time? Will we stand with Jesus, sealed by His Spirit, obeying not out of fear—but love?