

Can You Receive the Mark of the Beast Unwittingly?

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Soli Deo Gloria!

The answer to this question is, No. To be clear, "unwittingly" means *without knowing* or *without an intention* to do so. For decades now, many have feared that they might innocently receive the mark of the beast (cf. Rev13:16) without intending to do so. Various new and emerging technologies, such as social security numbers, credit cards, barcodes or QR codes, embedded microchips, and (more recently) vaccines, have been subjects of concern relative to whether they might be, or might be related to, the mark of the beast¹. While there could very well be legitimate concerns with how such technologies might be used in the future, they are not related to the mark of the beast today.

The issue of what particular technology the Beast may use to implement his "mark" is moot today. According to Revelation 13, the mark of the beast will be implemented by the False Prophet (on behalf of the Beast) at the midpoint of the 7-year Tribulation (i.e., the 70th Week of Daniel; Dan9:27). The Beast (i.e., the Antichrist) has not yet been revealed, and the Tribulation has not yet begun, so we are at least three and a half years away from the roll out of the mark of the beast system. Nothing anyone receives today is the mark of the beast.

But when the midpoint of the Tribulation arrives, and the mark of the beast system has been implemented, can one receive the mark of the beast unwittingly then? I believe the answer is still, No, and this conviction comes from a plain reading of the text of Scripture. At that time, according to Revelation 13:15, "as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed". The central issue during the last half of the Tribulation will not be whether one has taken the mark of the beast per se, but whether one has worshipped the beast. This is made clear in Revelation 14:9-11, "**If any man worship the beast** and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, **who worship the beast** and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name". Note that this dire warning immediately follows the worldwide, angelic exhortation to all those that dwell on the earth to "worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Revelation 14:7). Thus, the determinative issue is whether one worships God or the Beast.

During the last half of the Tribulation there will be immense pressure on all to take the mark of the beast, since those who do not have the mark will not be able to "buy or sell" at best (Revelation 13:18), or will "be killed" at worst (Revelation 13:15). However, one will receive the "mark" as validation that he has worshipped the Beast, and worshipping the Beast is a conscious, voluntary, and willful act. One cannot receive the "mark" without worshipping the Beast, so no one will receive it unwittingly or unknowingly.

¹ For textual reasons I believe the mark of the beast will most likely be a permanent and visible mark, something akin to a tattoo or a brand, applied to the surface of the skin on the right hand or forehead.

The Beast will begin his career as the ruler of the final phase of Daniel's fourth Gentile kingdom (cf. Daniel 7:23-25), often called the revived Roman empire. He will literally be an end times Caesar, and there is a direct analogy between the end times worship of the Beast and the worship of Caesar in the first few centuries AD. In the Roman empire of the first few centuries after Christ, all subjects of the empire were required to worship Caesar as a divine person². They demonstrated their allegiance to Caesar in a public ceremony held annually in which they offered a pinch of incense on an altar devoted to Caesar and confessed, "Caesar is Lord" (Cp., Romans 10:9). In doing so, they received a written certificate called a *libellus* validating their compliance with the requirement to worship Caesar. Roman subjects were required to present this document when stopped by Roman officials or when engaging in commerce in a Roman market. The future mark of the beast will be analogous to the *libellus* of the early centuries of Christianity. It will be the means by which one's compliance with the requirement to "worship the beast" is proven. No one will receive it unwittingly; on the contrary, the giving of it will be very closely guarded and awarded only to those who have publicly worshipped the Beast.

In conclusion, no one today has received, or can receive, the mark of the beast. Even when the mark of the beast system is formally implemented at the midpoint of the Tribulation, no one will receive the mark of the beast unwittingly. The mark of the beast, however it is manifested, will only be applied to those who have willfully worshipped the Beast.

² The Jews had a special dispensation exempting them from the general requirement to worship Caesar. In the early days of the Church, the Roman empire viewed Christianity as a sect of Judaism, which allowed Christians to enjoy the same exemption (cf. Acts 18:12-16). In time, however, Christianity became visibly distinct from Judaism, Christians lost their exemption (but largely refused to worship Caesar), and the Roman persecution of Christians resulted.