

The Seal of the Living God vs. the Mark of the Beast

Revelation employs symbols of seals and foreheads to construct an intriguing contrast between two groups of people in the Tribulation period. Revelation 7:3 introduces a group of righteous people—144,000 “servants of God”—who are described as being “sealed . . . on their foreheads.” The mark that they bear is said to be “[the Lamb’s] name and his Father’s name” (14:1). Revelation 13:16-17 introduces a second group of people who bear the mark of the beast either on their right hand or their forehead. Wearing the mark of the beast is synonymous with worshiping him (14:9, 11; 20:4).

The two groups are mutually exclusive. The table below contrasts them, showing that each mark conveys a powerful statement of its bearer’s identity and destiny.

	The 144,000: <i>Sealed with the Seal of the Living God</i>	The Beast-Followers: <i>Identified by the Impostor’s Mark</i>
Nature of the Mark	Sealed with the name of the Lamb and his Father on their foreheads (7:2-3; 14:1)	Marked on the right hand or forehead with the beast’s name or number (13:16-18; 14:9; 14:11; 20:4)
Object of Attention and Worship	The Lamb (14:1, 4); God (7:3; 14:4)	The beast (13:4; 13:8; 13:12-15)
Characteristics	Servants of God (7:3); redeemed “from the earth” (14:3) and “from mankind” (14:4); uniquely able to learn “a new song” (14:3); of high moral character (14:4-5)	The majority of the earth’s population (13:3; 13:8); a group that excludes those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life (13:8); deceived by another beast/the false prophet (13:11-14; 19:20)
Fate in the End Times	Excluded from specific divine judgments (9:3-6); by implication, opposed by the beast (13:7-8; 13:15-17)	Avoid persecution and risk of execution at the hands of the beast (13:7-8; 13:15-17); targeted by certain divine judgments (16:2); excluded from Christ’s thousand-year reign (20:4)
Eternal Destiny	Admitted to the New Jerusalem—the very presence of God (22:3-5)	Tormented with fire and sulfur—suffering the wrath of God in the lake of fire (14:9-11; cf. 20:10)
Essential Meaning	Portrays a believer’s identity, security, and assurance in his/her position before God (22:3-5; cf. John 6:27; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 2 Tim. 2:19)	Symbolizes an unbeliever’s rejection of God’s authority through worship of an impostor, justifying his/her eternal condemnation (14:9-11)
Points of Controversy	What is the group’s relation to the nation of Israel (7:4-8)? What is the significance of the number 144,000?	Who or what is the beast? Beyond the spiritual dimensions of being a beast-follower, is there some physical token of this identity? What is the significance of the number 666?