Twitter Thread by Houston Coley



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Let’s talk about “the mark of the beast.”

Every time some new vaccine becomes necessary, there’s a small-but-loud group of evangelicals and otherwise who believe taking this vaccine could be “pledging your allegiance to the devil.” But does this have any grounds in The Bible?

The so-called “mark of the beast” appears in The Revelation, so first we’ve gotta dispel some myths about the book as a whole.

I’d argue that if there’s one book that has been twisted most heavily by the “evangelical fanfiction lore” of the 80s and 90s, it’s gotta be Revelation.

American Christianity in the 90s was wack. After years of politicians stoking fears of communism & new world order, conservatives snowballed their vision of what “the apocalypse” would look like, and reverse-engineered their fears back into Revelation with stuff like Left Behind.

The Left Behind books were pretty critical to the end-times fearmongering. Even Liberty University’s Jerry Falwell said at the time, "in terms of its impact on Christianity, Left Behind is probably greater than that of any other book in modern times, outside The Bible.”

Meanwhile, Theologian David Carlson said, “Left Behind promotes a skewed view of the Christian faith that welcomes war and disaster, while dismissing peace efforts in the Middle East and elsewhere—all in the name of Christ.”

The Left Behind series was not really based on any theologically acceptable interpretation of Revelation - rather, it was based on how conservative evangelicals in the 1990s preferred to *imagine* Revelation. It was more red-white-and-blue sensationalism than Christian theology.

Now, I’m not saying Left Behind was directly responsible for anti-vax sentiments, but it did contribute to the misinterpretation of Revelation that saw “the mark of the beast” as something that would be forced upon us by “the man” rather than something we’d bring upon ourselves.

It’s very strange to me that so much of American Christianity is built on the profound fear of persecution, especially when so much of the NT says we should *expect it* and offers encouragement. I mean, really: the most frequently-repeated command in The Bible is “do not fear.”

One telltale sign of distorted Christianity is when it doesn’t inspire hope. The Gospel is the “good news” that God cares about humans enough to become like us, and the *great news* that She’s coming back to redeem and make all things new. Fear shouldn’t be part of the equation.

But so, okay, let’s discuss what The Revelation and “the mark of the beast” are really about. And if you want some dope animation to go along with it, here’s The Bible Project’s masterful video too.

https://t.co/6IzGEr06ij

Revelation is a highly symbolic, enigmatic and brilliantly-constructed book. But it’s not really about the antichrist. Primarily, it’s a word of encouragement, written specifically to 7 harshly persecuted churches in first-century Asia, meant to invoke truths of a deeper reality.

Much of the symbolism in Revelation, rather than pointing to the end of the world, actually foreshadows the more immediate fall of Rome. That said - the book also crystalizes what it means to follow Jesus in *any* period, and it does indeed point to the conclusion of the story.

Revelation is “apocalyptic literature” - but not always in the sense of the actual destructive apocalypse.

In ancient writing, an “apocalypse” is the unveiling of a deeper spiritual reality existing behind the scenes of every moment in life, suddenly made clear for all to see.

John’s “apocalypse” embodies Satan as a dragon, referencing his first appearance as a snake, and grapples with the idea that all Christians bow down to the devil when they fail to live out the steadfast love of Christ. John symbolizes this idolatry with a mark on their foreheads.

But the mark of the beast isn’t the only mark in Revelation. There’s also a mark of the lamb, meant to symbolize the thin remnant of Christians who, amidst the persecution of Rome and all the trials & temptations to come, remain true to the love and identity they know in Jesus.

The mark of the lamb and mark of the beast are not meant to literally refer to tattoos, microchips, cell phones, or flags. Rather, both marks symbolize a deeper spiritual allegiance, either to the unfailing selflessness of Christ, or the short-lived selfishness of the world.

The notion that the “mark of the beast” would literally appear as a “forced vaccine” is uniformly silly. If there really was a mark, it wouldn’t be one you could receive by accident or force - and the action wouldn’t be done with the intention of keeping your community healthy.

The mark of the beast is not literal. The mark of the beast is a symbol meant to represent the conscious sacrifice of your devotion to God, and thus your devotion to love, in exchange for devotion to yourself. Taking a vaccine? It’s the opposite of

that.

The church rejects God and embraces “the beast” whenever it succumbs to temptations of power and desire to be on top. Nationalism wasn’t forced on people of faith by “the man.” It was baked into culture over years of negligence. And *that’s* the mark we’re dealing with right now.