

## **Tattoos – A Mark of the End Times? (by Jon Ikin)**

*“My whole forearm is lucky,”* said Matt Banaham, England and Bath rugby star. *“Ace of spades, a pin-up lady sitting inside a horseshoe and a lucky dice. The four-leaf clover was my first tattoo. I got it on my eighteenth birthday and it is one of my most sacred ones.”* The twenty-nine year old winger is just one of many decorated celebrities who sport tattoos these days. David Beckham, Harry Styles, the late Amy Winehouse, you name them, they’re bodies have become public galleries of tattoo fashion. What once might have been considered tatty is now displayed with pride. “I LOVE BOOZE, SHOES AND BOYS WITH TATTOOS” boasts a girl’s t-shirt. Yes, there is definitely a new perspective on the ancient practise of tattooing. And some prophecy students believe that it could be a mark of the end times, getting people ready for the ultimate tattoo - the Mark of the Beast (Rev.13:16-18).

### **BODY ART’S BEGINNINGS**

So where and how did tattoos begin? A lot of ink has been spilled trying to answer that question and it is hard to be dogmatic. Some believe it started with ancient civilisations like the Aborigines, Chinese, Mayans or Aztecs, whilst others believe that it began at sea, in the prison cell, or in the barracks of various armed forces. Ultimately, however, the idea must have begun with the evil one himself, since tattooing is an act of defacing the human body made in the image of God (Gen.1:26-27). This is what Satan loves to see: people branding themselves like animals. And it is something he has inspired down the centuries. For instance, ancient pagan religions often used tattooing to show a person’s commitment to their false gods (*“Idolaters had their idols marked upon their foreheads, arms, etc. These are called sectarian marks, even at this day, among the Hindus and others, in India”* says Nicholson’s Bible Student’s Companion), and during the holocaust Hitler did everything he could to offend the Biblical consciences of his Jewish victims, including:

- Shaving their heads (like the broken Nazarite vow, Num.6:9)
- Stripping them naked (Lev.18)
- And marking their bodies with tattooed numbers in violation to God’s Law (Lev.19:28).

The more you think about it, the dark, spiritual association with tattoos is hard to deny, isn't it? Ask yourself, this question: have you ever seen a tattoo parlour that didn't look seedy? Or have you ever picked up a tattoo magazine and not felt you were holding something dodgy? No wonder skulls, snakes, dragons, emblems of death (such as the ace of spades), rude women, and pagan symbols feature so heavily in tattoos – because the master-mind behind it all is the evil one himself.

### **MAKING A MARK FOR JESUS?**

The stats on tats are hard to verify, but there is a growing number of Christians who feel it is acceptable – even desirable – to have tattoos. Randy Mastre is a Christian tattooist in Bismark, North Dakota. Apparently, *“he sees it as both an art form and a ministry.”* Along with Daniel Ostrowski, a minister who runs a tattoo business in Wisconsin, he helped found the Christian Tattoo Association, one of a several such groups in America. In fact, the number of preachers and Christian musicians bearing tattoos has grown rapidly: Damon Thompson, Todd Bentley, Jay Baker, P.O.D. (Payment On Death, band) are just a few of the better known names. Pastor Mike Haseltine says, *“I also have a lot of tattoos. The one on my back is a picture of Jesus out of the book of Revelation.”* These people clearly don't feel tattoos are sin on the skin. One lady writing on the internet said, *“I think it's very cool to have a small tasteful cross on the back of the base of your neck or upper back for example. It means you are saved and belong to God and is a wonderful witness.... I am thinking of marking myself as a Christian and I am a 58 year old lady!”* We certainly don't want to colour anyone's thoughts on people or appear to be overly-judgmental, but do Christians really have drawing rights to mark their bodies like this? There are a number of arguments from Scripture that show it is definitely wrong. Most significantly, the majority of them are from the New Testament. Those who say, 'It's only forbidden in the Old Testament' have only gone skin-deep in their research and need to think again. Consider the following:

- Leviticus 19:28 says: *“You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD.”* This verse had

to do with the pagan rituals of Canaan, and shows that body-marking was an abomination which God did not want Israel to practice.

- Zechariah 13:4-6 says: *“And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies...And one will say to him, ‘What are these wounds between your arms?’ Then he will answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’”* This prophecy of Zechariah’s is not speaking about the Lord Jesus, but about false prophets who will be expelled from the Messianic kingdom (read the wider context of v2-6). Notice that one of the features of these prophets is their body-markings. They have certain identifying marks on their skin. This is another Old Testament Scripture which associates tattoo-like activity with pagan religion and should satisfy us that it is wrong. The Lord Jesus will not allow tattoos in His future Kingdom on earth, so we shouldn’t take them now.
- Ephesians 5:11 says, *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”* As we have already mentioned, tattoos have a strong historical connection with the works of darkness. This includes the world of crime, gangs, prostitution (oriental prostitutes were known by their tattoos), occult activity, and acts of persecution (as in the holocaust and gulags). Therefore Christians should have nothing to do with them. *“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good...”* (3 John 11).
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is a powerful verse which says: *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Did you catch that? He wants our bodies to be found blameless at His coming. Sadly, a tattoo stains more than the conscience. It marks the body that will one day be presented to God (2 Cor.5:20).

- At this point, somebody may be thinking, 'But it's my body and I can do what I like with it.' If that is how you feel, then please consider two New Testament passages: Romans 14:7-8 says, *"For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."* This verse shows that when we become Christians, we are no longer free-agents to do as we wish. Jesus is our LORD and Saviour. He is the One who owns and controls our lives now. And this includes what we do with our bodies, as 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 also shows: *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; **therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.**"* It's not your body to do as you like with. When you became a Christian your body became the possession of Jesus Christ. It's not just *soul salvation* when you become a Christian, it is *whole salvation*. One day when the Lord Jesus raptures His church He will take the whole of you to heaven – body, soul and spirit. Therefore we should glorify God in our bodies and be ready for His coming.
- Some may be thinking, 'But I want a tattoo because it is fashionable and attractive.' 1 Peter 3:3 says (to ladies in particular), *"Do not let your adornment be merely outward...rather let it be the hidden person of the heart..."* And James 4:4 adds that, *"...Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* Again, this verse argues that Christians are to be different from the world, not like it. Not all fashion is wrong, but clearly some things like tattoos are and Christians should steer clear of them (see also Romans 12:2 and 1 John 2:15-17).

If we are true Christians and therefore members of the Body of Christ, we need to ask ourselves, *does Jesus want a tattooed body?* And will our resurrection bodies, made in Christ's likeness (Phil.3:20-21), have tattoos? If not, then surely we can conclude that the Lord doesn't want us to have them now.

We need to address this issue urgently. The last day's apostasy is seen not only in the church's abandonment of Biblical doctrine but also Biblical values. Never before have tattoos after conversion been considered either desirable or acceptable in a professing Christian until now (obviously tattoos before conversion cannot be helped and are not under discussion here). Never have there been genuine men and women of God who have deliberately gone out and got themselves tattooed. Never. So why now? What is going on? As we have already suggested, it appears to be a mark of the end times.

### **THE ULTIMATE TATTOO IS COMING**

No longer is the writing on the wall for this old world, now it's on men and women's bodies. In staggering numbers (apparently one in five Americans has a tattoo) the world is being conditioned by Satan for the Mark of the Beast. Revelation 13:16-18 shows how the False Prophet will practice this art of deception for the Antichrist: *"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, 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. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666."* Very simply, in the Tribulation, if you want to trade you will need a tattoo. This loyalty mark to Antichrist will be a literal mark of some description on either the hand or head where it will be visible and accessible. Some believe it will be what's called *a digital-tattoo* now being developed by mobile phone companies, placed on the skin. Others think it will be a computer chip just under the skin and operating through it. Whatever form it takes, technology and society are drawing ever closer to its arrival. In the past most people would have shunned the idea of having a mark on their bodies, but not now. As anyone walking down the high street can see, it has become a part of our culture. Every one of us needs to take this to heart.

*Remember, Satan wants to tattoo you too. We need to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and save ourselves from his seal of damnation and be ready instead for the rapture of the church. If you have not yet asked the Lord Jesus Christ to come under your skin and into your life, do so today. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).*

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