

Bible and the Headlines: Musing on Ink

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Ink has been in the headlines, and not in the usual way. The ink in the news is not the kind printed on paper. It is the kind that gets under the skin. And the general public is asking, “What does it mean?”

In anticipation of the Mike Tyson/Jake Paul fight, on November 15th the Nashville Tennessean carried the headline, “Explaining Mike Tyson's Face Tattoo: Why He Got It and What It Means.” Though now iconic for Tyson, article states, “Tyson first went to tattoo artist S. Victor Whitwell, looking to get hearts tattooed on his face, but Whitwell refused the design.” Whitwell felt Iron Mike needed warrior’s ink on his visage and persuaded Tyson to accept a design inspired by Maori tribesmen. Tyson’s face is his haka, the pre-battle dance of the Maoris.

The Times of Israel in its November 14th edition featured, “Trump’s Nominee to Lead Pentagon Has Multiple Christian and Crusader-Inspired Tattoos.” While it is Mr. Hegseth’s religious-themed tattoos that draw the paper’s criticism, the article also notes, “Hegseth, 44, has a litany of ink that points to his military service and penchant for patriotism.” These other patterns include text from the Constitution and the crest of Hegseth’s infantry regiment. The tattoo drawing leftist fire is a Jerusalem Cross, the symbol of the Crusaders’ kingdom briefly established in Jerusalem. The Times states, “Crusader symbols have also grown popular on the far-right.”

The Independent on November 15th asked, “‘Christian motto’ or Nationalist Dog Whistle? Could A Tattoo Derail Trump’s Pick For Defense Secretary?” This article takes exception to Hegseth’s bicep tattoo ‘Deus Vult’ (God wills it) and repeats the left’s forensic trail for anything the right uses from the classics “. . . which has been associated with white supremacist groups.” The article states that Hegseth’s ink was the subject of an ‘insider threat’ accusation that prevented him from some military duties.

The two books of the Bible that talk about ‘ink’ are Leviticus and Revelation. The book of Leviticus contains God’s instructions on holy living. Among these instructions is, “You may not make cuts in your flesh in respect for the dead, or have marks printed on your bodies: I am the Lord” (Lev 19:28). Revelation takes a different approach. Instead of forbidding all ink, God revealed to the Apostle John the consequences of getting the wrong ink: “If anyone worships the Beast . . . and receives its mark . . . they will drink the wine of God’s fury . . . They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb . . . There will be no rest day or night for . . . anyone who receives the mark of its (the Beast) name” (Rev 14:9-11).

Jake Paul proved that Mike Tyson is not the same warrior who was tatted as a Maori. Pete Hegseth’s tattoos were once a mark of the faithful, but are now coopted by others for less than Christian purposes. No one knows what the mark/name of the Beast will look like, but since the Bible says that Satan “. . . masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14), I would not rule out the possibility the mark will be a religious tattoo.

The headlines and the Bible make it clear- ink conveys a message. The question to the inked is: Is your tattoo a message you will always be able to live with?