

The Mark of the Beast and the Seal of God

Marc Rasell

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Chapter 1 The Mark of the Beast

The number 666 and the mark of the beast tend to invoke in people's minds the image of some sort of tattoo or mark on the forehead or hand. Others believe it may have something to do with a barcode, a microchip in your credit card, or even one embedded in the skin so you can buy things without needing a card. They look for some evil antichrist to arise that will enforce this scheme and gain world domination. Perhaps this view has come about because we know that those who don't receive the mark won't be able to buy or sell (Rev. 13:17).

While this interpretation is striking to the imagination, there is something much more subtle about the mark of the beast. The worse deceptions are those that are mingled with some truth, making them harder to detect; Paul warned us that the devil can transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Often in Bible history those who opposed the truth claimed to be worshipping God (John 16:2). Before the destruction of Jerusalem many people attended the temple, the problem was they also worshiped idols and oppressed their poor workers and generally had a low sense of morality (Amos 2:6; 5:26; 8:4-6). Therefore the worst deceptions are those that appear in a religious garb and appear to be holy but in fact allow people to live immoral lives and break God's commandments. This is what Paul called having form of godliness but denying the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5).

Knowing something about the nature of the beast will help us to identify its mark. The sea beast of Revelation is a blasphemous persecuting power (Rev. 13:5-7). This is reflected in the little horn of Daniel which shares the same characteristics as well as the same 1260 day/year time period (Dan. 7:25). This time period is mentioned in Daniel and Revelation as three and a half years (time, times and half a

time), also as 42 months and as 1260 days (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). These numbers all equate to the same prophetic time period (note: it can be seen from the figures that a prophetic month has 30 days). In prophecy a prophetic day stands for a literal year¹, so we have a time period of 1260 years. Because the sea beast and little horn share the same characteristics and time period for their persecution, they are the same entity.

The little horn is further described by Daniel as thinking to change “times and laws” (Dan. 7:25), a reference to God’s Sabbath commandment which is the only law involving time among the 10 commandments. This same entity is reflected in the man of lawlessness mentioned by Paul as the man who sits in the temple of God (the church) as if he were God (2 Thess. 2:3-4), thus a blaspheming power which is against the laws of God. In summary, the characteristics of the beast are that it blasphemes, is against God’s laws, and persecuted the saints for an extended period of time.

Now that we have looked at the characteristics of the beast, it also helps to have an understanding of the meaning of the Greek word mark, “charagma”. This term was used for a mark or stamp placed on donkeys, slaves, and documents; it was also used to certify that a copy of a document was genuine; in essence it was a stamp of ownership². The word could also be used to refer to an image, statue or idol (Acts 17:29).

This means that those who receive the mark of the beast are receiving its mark of ownership. It is also apparent that those who belong to the beast also become like

¹ William H. Shea, “Year-Day Principle” parts 1-2, Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Volume 1 (Washington, DC.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992) pp. 67-110

² Theological dictionary of the New Testament. 1964-c1976. Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin. (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (9:416). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

the beast just as an image reflects the original. Just as the beast is described as a power that blasphemes; those who receive the mark of the beast also blaspheme God (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21).

The saints, who do not receive the mark of the beast, keep God's commandments (Rev. 14:12), which implies that the followers of the beast are breaking God's commandments. The beast has been identified as the little horn which sought to change God's law and also as the man of lawlessness; consequently the followers of the beast do not keep God's law.

The beast is a persecuting power and likewise the followers of the beast enact a civil penalty against those who do not receive its mark (Rev. 13:17); finally a death penalty is threatened (Rev. 13:15). Religious totalitarianism is the way the beast operates and its followers adopt the same measures.

In Exodus 13:9 God told the people to put the law on their hand and between their eyes, meaning they should accept the principles of the law in their mind and heart, and carry them out in their daily life³. The reference to the mark of the beast in the forehead and the hand similarly means believing in the teachings of the beast and following its orders.

Sometimes a runaway slave would be branded with three letters signifying fugitive, something like FUG⁴. In the same way the followers of the beast have run away from the truth, so they are given over to a delusion because they refused to love the truth (2 Thess. 2:11).

Another interesting comparison can be made with the vision given in Ezekiel chapter nine, where certain people were marked to be spared, but the idolaters who

³ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, Conflict of the Ages Series, Volume 3 (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898) p. 612

⁴ TDNT 7:659 from C. Mervyn Maxwell, *The Mark of the Beast*, Symposium on Revelation – Book II, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Volume 7 (Washington, DC.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992) p. 58

did not receive the mark were to be destroyed. In a similar way at the end of time everyone will either receive the mark of the beast or the seal of God. Those who receive the mark of the beast will suffer the seven last plagues and be destroyed (Rev. 16:2; 19:20), but those who receive the seal of God will be saved (Rev. 14:1-3). Therefore it is important to understand what the mark and seal refer to.

It should be understood that the end time seal of God is something that people receive just prior to the return of Christ, when the angels are represented as holding back the four winds (Rev. 7:2-3; Dan. 12:1). As in Ezekiel's vision, it is character that makes the difference; those who sigh and cry because of the abominations done in the land are marked for salvation (Ezek. 9:4).

Having surveyed the evidence, it's clear that character is an important factor in the mark of the beast. Those who receive the mark adopt a beast like character. The mark of ownership changed them into the likeness of the beast. Therefore a visible sign on the forehead or hand is not what is being spoken of here, but something more subtle which we will unravel as we delve deeper into this topic.

Chapter 2 The End Time False Gospel

One clue to the mark of the beast is found in the story of Cain who was marked so that no one would kill him to avenge the murder of his brother Abel (Gen. 4:15); in mercy God spared Cain's life. The problem with Cain's worship was that he did not offer a blood sacrifice as Abel did (Gen. 4:3-5). Cain did not admit he was a sinner in need of divine grace; he rejected the atonement of Christ as symbolised in the sacrificial lamb and instead brought the works of his own hands. He disobeyed God by rejecting the divine provision for his salvation, and in worshipping in his own way contrary to God's directions⁵.

Cain represents a class of worshippers who trust in something else for salvation other than Christ's atonement. Some try to work their way to heaven by good works, others go to the opposite extreme of saying they are saved by grace so it does not matter whether they keep the law of God. Neither legalism nor antinomianism properly reflects the truth of the gospel; both deny our need of Christ as our Saviour, one by relying upon good works, the other by not recognising that we need repentance for breaking God's law.

The end time false gospel is based on the premise that we do not need to keep God's law. Such a view degrades the atonement of Christ because without the law there is no sin (Rom. 4:15), and hence no need of a Saviour. Without the law people's sense of sin is lessened, hence they have a lesser appreciation of what Christ has done for them. They worship God while continuing to live a sinful life. This is in effect what the serpent promised Eve, that she could eat of the tree and yet not die (Gen. 3:4). The serpent even suggested that she would somehow be wiser and enlightened

⁵ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Conflict of the Ages Series, Volume 1 (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1890) ch. 5

by her disobedience (Gen. 3:4-5). Today many believe that the gospel sets them free from any law, but such enlightenment is not based on God's word and is a subtle deception.

Jesus warned against this type of false reasoning, like those who say 'Lord, Lord' but do not do what God says (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46). They are building on the sand by not putting into practice the words of Christ which include the injunction, I came NOT to abolish the law (Mt. 5:17; 7:24-27). In Proverbs 28:9 it even states that those who turn their ear away from hearing the law, even their prayer is an abomination!

The false gospel is one which cries, "only believe" and you will be saved. Yet James says, even the devils believe but they tremble (James 2:19). A faith which has no works is a dead faith (James 2:17). While a person is not saved by his works (Eph. 2:8-9), a faith which never leads to any good works is unsound. It is impossible for someone to have the truth abiding in them and yet have no change in their life. Therefore it is important to understand what the true gospel teaches about sanctification.

Chapter 3 The True Gospel

John in his epistles made it clear that the truth needs to abide in us (1 John 2:24-28); an intellectual exercise is not genuine conversion. Merely to know certain doctrines or have a certain knowledge does not constitute rebirth; unless that truth also abides in the person it will not profit them. Sound doctrine is important but it must lead to godliness (2 Tim. 3:5; 1 Tim. 4:16).

The Gospel of John sets forth the requirement of rebirth as a condition of entering God's kingdom (John 3:5). This is more than simply a theoretical knowledge but a living faith; being changed by the abiding word and Spirit into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul said that the old self has to be crucified (Rom. 6:6), so that we can become a new person, a new creation, raised to new life (Rom. 6:9-11). This is in fact what baptism symbolises, dying and rising to new life.

Jesus spoke not only of being delivered from the condemnation of sin (John 3:18; 5:24), but also of being set free from the power of sin (John 8:31-36). To claim to be abiding in Christ while being dominated and controlled by Satan is an anomaly which cannot be reconciled with the truth. Although we are not saved by the law, grace does not lead a person to live a sinful life (Rom. 6:14-15).

The truth about justifying faith taught by Paul (Rom. 3:28), does not abolish the results of genuine faith which is sanctification or being made holy by Christ. Paul taught that a believer is controlled by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:4), and that we are being transformed (Rom. 12:2). Paul uses the word metamorphosis to describe this change; it is so radical it is like a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. Jesus taught that those who abide in him (the True Vine), will bear fruit and his Father will prune

them so they will bear more fruit (John 15:2). It is clear that those who are genuinely converted will be changed into the likeness of Christ.

However, even those whose lives are dominated by the Spirit, and live for Christ do make mistakes (1 John 1:8-9); they are not so perfect that they don't need a Saviour; they still need to be justified by faith. The difference between them and the wicked is that their master has changed; they are no longer controlled by the flesh, the devil and sinful desires, but by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1; 1 John 2:16). This is such a radical change that it is called rebirth (John 3:5).

Paul made it clear in his writings that those who live unrighteous lives, who commit murder, get drunk, or commit adultery will not inherit God's kingdom (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). This includes Christians who according to Paul will have to face the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). The gospel is not a license to live a sinful life; rather it is a transforming power to restore us into the image of Christ.

The believer in Christ needs to die daily, confess his sins, deny self, and take up his cross and follow his master (1 Cor. 15:31; Mt. 16:24-26). The way to life is narrow and strait (Mt. 7:14), but these hardships are the means of purifying the soul and bringing the believer into closer communion with Christ (Rom. 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:7). We are called upon to follow in the footsteps of our master. When we share in the sufferings of Christ we are drawn into closer communion with our Lord and we will one day share in his glory (1 Pet. 4:13).

Peter's description of growth in holiness, adding various graces to our character has been called Peter's ladder (2 Pet 1:5-8). The idea that a believer remains in sin is alien to his thinking. He admonishes us to make our calling and election sure, and says that those who lack these things are blind (2 Pet. 5:9-10). The believers have been purified by obeying the truth (1 Pet 1:22), they need to be holy as God is holy (1

Pet. 1:16). They are also called a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). It is clear then that holiness or sanctification is something that Peter, the disciple of Christ expected to see in the followers of Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews says without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Personal holiness is vital; it reflects the fact that we have a genuine relationship with God. Without it a believer is described by Peter as being blind and lost. Any gospel which teaches that there is no need for personal holiness is therefore a false gospel, giving people a false assurance that it does not matter if they live sinful lives. Jude described the teachers of this type of false gospel as clouds without rain and trees without fruit (Jude 12). Such a religion is just an empty profession.

With so many admonitions it is hard to understand how people could come to the view that personal holiness is not important. Peter warned of those who even in his day had twisted the writings of Paul to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul, in combating the legalism of his time, put great emphasis on justification by faith. Yet this doctrine was never meant to deny the truth about sanctification. Paul himself said he had not achieved perfection but was pressing on (Phil. 3:12). The life of a Christian is a pilgrimage, constantly progressing nearer to the heavenly city (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Chapter 4 The Law

Holiness is not defined by human standards but by God's law and the word of God (Isa. 8:20). Lucifer tried to reject the law of God and rely on his own wisdom and what followed was anarchy, cruelty, rebellion and woe⁶. The law of God is what makes us conscious of sin (Rom. 3:20). The law itself is holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12), and is not nullified by faith (Rom. 3:31). The whole universe is governed by laws to regulate it for our benefit and happiness. The path of lawlessness only leads to chaos, unhappiness and destruction (Ps. 1).

The believer who is sanctified, will obey God's law and thus prolong his days (Deut. 6:2), even to eternal life. Paul encouraged children to keep the commandment to honour their parents because this was the commandment with a promise (Eph. 6:1-2); that promise was long life.

John defines sin as transgression of the law (1 John 3:4); he teaches that those who break the commandments do not know God (1 John 2:3-4). Those who keep on sinning have not been born again (1 John 3:9). Therefore the law is crucially linked to holiness, a holy person is one who keeps the law. Not merely in some legalistic sense, for in the new covenant it is written in the heart (Heb. 8:10; Jer. 31:33).

Only those who have been reborn and have the Spirit can truly keep the law because the carnal mind is at enmity with God and cannot be subject to the law of God (Rom 8:7). It is only through the indwelling Spirit, and the love of God, that the law can be fulfilled (Rom 13:10). To keep the law in a superficial way is not truly keeping the law (Mt. 23:27). The 10 commandments are clearly endorsed in the New

⁶ Patriarchs and Prophets, chs. 1 and 3

Testament. This is seen by the fact that they are in the Ark of the Covenant in the heavenly temple (Rev. 11:19), where Jesus ministers as our High Priest (Heb. 8:2).

Jesus made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount that it was not his purpose to abolish the law (Mt. 5:17). In his sermon he showed the depths of the law; what goes on in a persons heart matters. A mere superficial keeping of the law is not enough; our righteousness has to exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). Yet, Jesus also makes it clear that this in no way cancels out the slightest jot of the law (Mt. 5:18-19).

[Chapters 5-8 omitted from the preview]

Chapter 5 The Seal of God

Chapter 6 End Time Polarisation

Chapter 7 Responding to the Longsuffering of God

Chapter 8 Bonus Chapter – Did Christ Change the Sabbath to Sunday?

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