



## Session 16 ■ Special Interest Topic 2

### The Mark of the Beast and the Seventh-Day Sabbath

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The mark of the beast has been the subject of much speculation throughout the Christian era. Some have implied that the prophecy was fulfilled in the first century among those to whom Revelation was first written. Their problem is that no commentator or historian can find such a fulfilment recorded. It is also apparent this crisis over worship occurs at the very end of human history and will be readily identified when it is enforced.

Today there are some who claim the mark is a computer chip placed in the right hand or the forehead. However, Revelation 14:9-11 seems to imply that those who receive it do so as a result of a decision they have made regarding worshipping the beast and his image. In making this decision they now incur the wrath of God.

It must be possible to resist receiving the mark as the threats of losing one's livelihood by not being able to buy or sell and life itself are made in Revelation 13:15-17. The mark of the beast and worship of the image to the beast are choices people make: they are identifiable as they are connected to worship choices.

Revelation affirms that those who remain loyal to God keep the commandments of God. (see Revelation 12:17; 14:12) It is unlikely that those remaining loyal to God will have problems with society regarding how they relate to the last six commandments. These six commandments relate to how we treat each other. One could hardly imagine people persecuting others because they refused to steal, lie, commit adultery and honoured their parents etc. The issues coming out of Revelation 12-14 clearly focus in the areas where the commandments of God relate to worship. By worshipping the beast and image, and blaspheming the name of God we can see the first three are being violated by the antichrist powers.

While we can see that the first four commandments regarding worship are the focus in Revelation 13, the mark of the beast indicates a more direct attack upon the Sabbath commandment. The seal of God in Revelation is also seen in contrast to the mark of the beast as those who face the final crisis have either the seal of God in the forehead (Revelation 7:3) or the mark of the beast either in the right hand or forehead. (Revelation 13:14-17)

Christians understand that God has been at work sealing His people through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives (2 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30). At the end-time crisis over worship we find an appropriate test coming to the fore which will clearly identify those who are loyal to God as those that keep the commandments of God and remain loyal to Jesus (Revelation 14:12)

The highly esteemed biblical scholar, Meredith Kline, shows that the Ten Commandments follow the format of an ancient covenant which was stamped with a seal of ownership and authority in the centre. The seventh-day Sabbath being the fourth commandment names God as the Creator and therefore stands as the seal of the covenant found in the centre of the Ten Commandments.<sup>1</sup>

That the Sabbath should be a fitting sign or seal (the two words can be used interchangeably) can best be understood by the Old Testament background, for, as we have seen so often before, Revelation and its symbolic language is constantly referring to Old Testament stories of Israel to illustrate what is happening to those who choose to follow Jesus at the end-time.

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 120.

God gave to Israel what can be called “**sign commandments**” which were given in order that:

1. They might **remember Him** and what He had done for them
2. They were to function as identifying **signs or symbols** of a special relationship they had with the Creator
3. They involved **some form of ritual of obedience and worship** (in contrast to the other commandments which involved something like stealing, killing or adultery).
4. Obedience clearly identified the people of God in contrast to those who worshiped other gods. In other words it was **easily observed** by others.

Examples of sign commandments can be seen in circumcision (Genesis 17:11) the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the law of the firstborn, both of which are signs on the hand and forehead (Exodus 13:9, 16).

**The seventh-day Sabbath is used as a sign commandment for the people of God.**

The Sabbath is the sign commandment of the Covenant (or Ten Commandments) and as such is appropriately found at the heart of the Decalogue.

1. It involves **remembering God** as Creator. (Exodus 20:8-11)
2. It functions as an **identifying sign or symbol** of a special relationship they had with the Creator (Ezekiel 20:12, 20)
3. It involves a form of **obedience in worship**.
4. It is **observable** in such a way as to declare who is worshiping the Creator alone.

**How does God place signs (or seals) on people?**

Obedience to God’s commands is expressed as a way of showing love and loyalty towards God and is described as a **sign on the hand or forehead** (Deuteronomy 6:4-8; 11:18-21).

In the end-time crisis over worship those who receive **God’s protection** have the seal of God in their foreheads. (Revelation 7:3)

On the other hand:

**The mark of the beast is revealed using the language of a sign commandment:**

1. It involves **remembering and honouring the beast** that was wounded by a sword and yet lived. Revelation 13:14
2. It functions as an **identifying sign or symbol** of a special relationship they had with the beast and as such find protection. (Revelation 13:15-17)
3. It involves a form of **obedience in worship**.
4. It is **observable** in such a way as to declare who is worshiping the beast and its image.
5. Obedience to the beast is expressed as a way of showing loyalty and is described as a **sign on the hand or forehead** (Revelation 13:16)
6. Those who have this sign or mark **receive protection** (Revelation 13:15-17)

**The attack upon seventh-day Sabbath worship of the Creator in Revelation 13 is made by substituting a Sabbath-like mark.**

<b>Exodus 20:8-11</b>	<b>Revelation 13:15-17</b>
Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy...the seventh-day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.	the mark, that is, the name of beast or the number of his name
Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh-day...you shall not do any work.	so that no one may buy or sell who does not have the mark
Neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.	everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave receives the mark

**The mark of the beast has all the elements needed to oppose the seventh-day Sabbath:**

**God’s name appears in the Sabbath commandment.**

The mark of the beast is the name of the beast

**God’s “number” is the seventh-day Sabbath**

The beast has a number of its name: 666.

**God’s seventh-day Sabbath is a day of rest from work**

The mark of the beast will restrict work but for different reasons.

**The seventh-day Sabbath provides economic release**

The mark of the beast uses economic force.

**The seventh-day Sabbath is an invitation from the Creator to rest**

The mark of the beast is restless rebellion against the Creator being enforced.

**The seventh-day Sabbath rest restores and refreshes**

Those who receive the mark of the beast will never find the rest they seek. (14:11)

God’s response to the mark of the beast of chapter 13 is found in the messages of the three angels of chapter 14:6-12. Leading the way is a gospel invitation. (verse 6)

The reasons for worshiping God as Creator are taken out of the wording and reasons for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. (Revelation 14:7)

Rightly understood, the Sabbath commandment could be called a gospel commandment. Only those who are resting in Jesus can really keep the Sabbath rest. They are trusting in the finished work of Jesus for salvation and they are resting from their own labours.

While not all is yet understood regarding unfulfilled prophecy and we must remain open to see more as we draw closer to the end time, we can see from the above clear indications that the mark of the beast will be in opposition to the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath.