

The Seal of God *and* Mark of the Beast: Part 1



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:12, Eph. 2:8–10, Matt. 27:45–50, Rev. 13:15–17, Rev. 14:4, Luke 5:18–26.*

Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’” (*Revelation 7:2, 3, NKJV*).

As we study end-time events in regard to the mark of the beast, one crucial point that comes through is the difference between how God operates and how the enemy of souls does.

As we have been studying, the central issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan are loyalty, authority, and worship. The prophecies describing the beast power in Revelation 13, the little horn in Daniel 7, and the “son of perdition” in 2 Thessalonians 2 all speak of a power that usurps God’s authority, commands loyalty, and introduces a counterfeit system of worship. And it does so through the use of force, coercion, and at times bribes and rewards—all in order to compel worship.

In contrast, love is the great motivating force of the kingdom of God. Rather than worshipping the beast, God’s people find their greatest joy and highest delight in worshipping Him. They are committed to Him because they know how committed He is to them. There is only one thing that will keep any of us from receiving the mark of the beast in the end time—a love for Jesus so deep that nothing can break our hold upon Him.

In this lesson, we will explore these themes further.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 10.

Steadfast Endurance

As we have seen in Revelation 14:7, God calls all people to worship the Creator. This is the first angel's message. In Revelation 14:8, God warns people about "Babylon," a false religious system with roots back in ancient Babylon. This is the second angel's message.

In Revelation 14:9, 10, the third angel warns against worshipping the beast. The angel declares in a loud voice, " 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God' " (NKJV).

Read Revelation 14:12. What two characteristics do we discover in this passage about God's last-day people? Why are both important?

The Greek word for "patience" is *hupomone*, which is better translated "steadfast endurance." God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him in the face of opposition and fierce persecution. Through His grace, they stand with steadfast endurance, living God-centered, grace-filled, obedient lives.

Worshipping the Creator (*Rev. 14:7*) stands in direct opposition to worshipping the beast (*Rev. 14:9*) and finds its expression in a people who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). This final conflict over allegiance to Christ or allegiance to the beast power revolves around worship, and at the heart of this great controversy between good and evil is going to be the Sabbath.

Read Romans 8:1–4, Ephesians 2:8–10, and Colossians 1:29. What do these passages teach us about the result of living by faith?

Living by faith, we receive His grace, and our lives are changed. The committed followers of the Savior not only will have faith "in" Jesus but also will have the faith "of" Jesus. Jesus' quality of end-time faith will be theirs, and they will remain faithful, even unto death, as Jesus did.

How faithful are you in the little things? What might that tell you about how you will be when the real trial comes? (See Luke 16:10.)

The Cosmic Struggle

Read Matthew 27:45–50. What does this teach us about what Christ experienced on the cross? What did Jesus mean by asking God why He had forsaken Him, and how does this scene help us understand what it means to have “the faith of Jesus”?

Hanging on the cross, enshrouded in darkness, bearing the guilt, shame, and condemnation of the sins of the world, and shut off from the sense of His Father’s love, Jesus depended on the relationship that He had with the Father throughout His life. That is, through a life of complete dependence upon the Father, even in good times, Jesus had been prepared for the worst times—even the cross. The Savior trusted, even when all around Him the circumstances cried out for Him to doubt. Even when it seemed that God had forsaken Him, Jesus didn’t give up.

“Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father’s acceptance heretofore given Him. . . . By faith, Christ was victor.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant*, p. 277.

The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep, so trusting, so committed, that all the demons in the cosmos and all the trials on earth cannot shake it. It is a faith that trusts when it cannot see, believes when it cannot understand, hangs on when there is little to hang on to. This “faith of Jesus” is itself a gift we receive by faith and it will carry us through the crisis ahead. It is “the faith of Jesus” dwelling in our hearts that enables us to worship Christ as supreme and steadfastly endure when Revelation’s mark of the beast is enforced.

And yet, it is not something that out of nowhere suddenly appears. God’s people have been learning to live by faith, day by day, now. In good times, in bad times, when God feels close, when God seems far away—it doesn’t matter. “The just shall live by faith” (*Gal. 3:11; see also Hab. 2:4*). The time for preparation is now. Every trial now, if endured in faith, can bear precious fruit in our lives.

Think about a time when life seemed to crumble around you and all that you had was your faith. How did you get by? What lessons did you learn? What did you experience that could help others who might be going through something similar?

The Ungodly Chain

The prophecy regarding the mark of the beast is about religious intolerance, an economic boycott, persecution, and eventually a death decree. Surprisingly, it also is a message of encouragement. Even in the worst of times, God will sustain His people who “keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). And, among those commandments, of course, is the fourth—the seventh day Sabbath.

The mark-of-the-beast prophecy in Revelation 13 tells us about the worst, the absolute fever pitch, of Satan’s war against God. His first strategy in this campaign is deception. Revelation 13 tells us about a time in the future when the devil will work through an earthly religious-political power called the beast and resort to force.

Religious persecution, of course, is not new. It has been around ever since Cain killed Abel for worshiping the way God instructed them to worship (*see Gen. 4:1–8*). Jesus said persecution would happen even to believers in the first century and down through the ages: “‘The time is coming,’” He warned, “‘that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service’” (*John 16:2, NKJV; see also Matt. 10:22, 1 Pet. 4:12*).

The mark-of-the-beast prophecy is about the final link in this ungodly chain. Like the persecutions in the past, it is designed to force everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and an approved system of worship.

Read Revelation 13:15–17. What will God’s end-time people face in the final crisis?

The prophecy says the persecution will start with economic sanctions: “No one can buy or sell” unless they have “the mark.” When this happens, the immense majority will capitulate. Anyone who refuses will eventually be placed under a death decree.

The devil is preparing professed Christians by compromises in their lives to receive the mark of the beast when the final test comes upon us in the future. God’s love for each one of us will strengthen us and preserve us during the troublous times ahead.

Read Galatians 6:7–9. Though this is not written in the context of last-day events, why is the principle here so relevant to issues over the mark of the beast and how we can stand faithful?

Those Who Follow the Lamb

Read Revelation 13:1, 2. Where does the beast come from, and who gives the beast his authority?

The first beast power of Revelation 13 receives his power, seat, and great authority from the dragon. Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20:2 identify the dragon as Satan. Satan is a cunning foe and works through earthly powers. Revelation 12:3–5 says this “dragon”—the devil—attempted to destroy the “male Child” as soon as He was born. This “male Child” was later “caught up to God and His throne” (*NKJV*). This, of course, refers to Christ. Desiring to destroy the Christ child, Satan worked through Herod and imperial Rome. At the end of Jesus’ life, a Roman governor, Pilate, condemned Christ to die, a Roman executioner nailed Him to the cruel cross, a Roman soldier pierced Him with a spear, and Roman soldiers guarded His tomb. According to Revelation 13:2, the dragon, Satan, working through pagan Rome, would give the seat of its government to this emerging beast power.

“Though primarily representing Satan, the dragon, in a secondary sense, represents the Roman Empire. . . . The power succeeding the Roman Empire, which received from the dragon ‘his power, and his seat, and great authority,’ is clearly papal Rome.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 817. Historian A. C. Flick explains that “out of the ruins of political Rome, arose the great moral Empire in the ‘giant form’ of the Roman Church.”—*The Rise of the Medieval Church* (1900), p. 150, as quoted in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 817.

Read Revelation 13:3 and Revelation 14:4. What contrast do you see in these verses?

In contrast to “all the world,” who follows the beast, God will have a people who will “follow the Lamb” instead. As always, it will be one side or the other, for Jesus or against Jesus. There will be then, as now, no middle ground, no neutral position. To not firmly commit to Jesus is, consciously or not, to commit to the other side.

“ ‘And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved’ ” (*Matt. 10:22, NKJV*). **How ready are you to endure to the end?**

Jesus: Our Only Mediator

Read Revelation 13:4, 5. What identifying marks of the beast power do we discover in these verses?

The beast of Revelation is an apostate religious power that rises out of pagan Rome and grows to become a worldwide system of worship. According to Revelation 13:5, it is a blasphemous power. In the New Testament, blasphemy is equated with assuming the privileges and prerogatives of God as an equal.

Read Luke 5:18–26 and John 10:33. What two aspects of blasphemy do these verses identify?

Jesus was accused of blasphemy by the leaders. In Jesus' case, the accusations were unjust because He has all the powers and prerogatives of God—including the right to forgive our sins. And that is because Jesus is God. Or as He so powerfully expressed it: “ ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”?’ ” (John 14:9).

Meanwhile, 1 Timothy 2:5 teaches that there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. In contrast, the Roman Church teaches that the priest is the mediator between God and sinful humanity. But because the priest himself is a sinful human being, he cannot be our mediator because he also needs a mediator. Blasphemy also is defined as the claim of any human to be God or to stand in the place of God. Here are just two statements from the Roman Church's authoritative sources:

“The pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man. . . . He is as it were GOD on earth.”—Lucius Ferraris, “Papa,” article 2 in his *Prompta Bibliotheca* (1763), vol. 6, pp. 25–29.

Pope Leo XIII boasted: “We [the popes] hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty.”—*The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII* (New York: Benziger, 1903), p. 193.

These claims become even more relevant when we understand that the prefix *anti-*, as in *antichrist*, doesn't always mean “against” but also can mean “in the place of.” Hence antichrist also means “in place of Christ.” Talk about blasphemy!

Further Thought: “From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. . . . In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Throughout Revelation, worship and Creation are indissolubly linked. The essence of the controversy between good and evil and the issues surrounding the mark of the beast revolve around whether God is worthy to be worshiped.

As we have seen, the concept of Christ as Creator is at the very heart of Sabbath worship. Jesus consistently underlines the significance of the day of which He calls Himself the “Lord” (*Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5*). The Sabbath is an eternal reminder of our identity. It reminds us of who we are as human beings. It places worth on every human being. It constantly reinforces the idea that we are created beings and that our Creator is worthy of our allegiance and worship. This is the reason why the devil hates the Sabbath so much. It is the golden link that unites us with our Creator, and this is why it will play such a crucial role in the final crisis at the end.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are the basic principles behind the sea beast’s claim to authority? In what ways can those same attitudes be lodged in our hearts without our knowledge?
- 2 How do you respond to those who argue that the idea of a literal Satan is a primitive superstition that educated, or at least intelligent, people can’t take seriously? What arguments could you use in response?

“I Can’t Do This”

By Andrew McChesney

The party sounded perfect. A table was booked at a club in Harare, Zimbabwe. Alcohol was purchased, and people were invited. But Elder didn’t come. “What happened?” Hubert asked when he later saw his friend.

“I can’t do this,” Elder replied. “I’m an elder.”

Hubert had heard the explanation before. He and Elder had become friends while teaching at a high school in Harare. Nineteen-year-old Hubert was taking off a year to teach before entering the university. Elder was 25 and an elder at a Seventh-day Adventist church. Hubert partied, but Elder would not participate. He always explained, “I can’t do this. I’m an elder.”

Hubert had never met an Adventist before, and he thought, *This guy is true to his church*. But he declined Elder’s invitations to go to church.

The next year, Hubert enrolled at Midlands State University in Gweru. He kept remembering Elder, and he visited an Adventist church for the first time. The people were warm and friendly, and the sermon touched his heart. During the semester break, he went to another Adventist church while visiting an aunt. It got to the point that every time he saw a church, he wanted to go inside. He felt like something was missing from his spiritual life.

For his second year of studies, Hubert received a scholarship to study in Russia. He wondered whether he would find an Adventist church there.

One Saturday, he was drunk when Mildred arrived at the birthday party of a mutual friend at 8:00 P.M. in Moscow. “Why did you come so late?” he asked.

“I was at church,” Mildred said.

“But it’s Saturday,” Hubert said. “Church is on Sunday.”

“Well, I’m a Seventh-day Adventist,” she said.

Hubert couldn’t believe his ears. Mildred saw his interest and invited him to go to church the next Sabbath. She even waited for him in the metro station on Sabbath morning. But Hubert was embarrassed that she had seen him drunk and did not show up. When she called to see where he was, he found himself saying, “I’m sorry. I’ll come next Sabbath.” Mildred called him throughout the week to remind him of his promise. He accompanied her to the Moscow International Seventh-day Adventist Church on Sabbath.

A year later, Hubert gave his heart to Jesus in baptism. He contacted Elder and thanked him for being faithful. Elder was overjoyed!



Today, Hubert Nyabadza is an active church member. “I am thankful to God that He led me to the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” he said.

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan:

“To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives.” For more information, visit IWillGo2020.org.

Part I: Overview

Revelation is a book of contrasts. This week's study discusses the seal of God and the mark of the beast. Throughout the centuries, the Sabbath has been a special sign of allegiance to God. The Sabbath has revealed that God is worthy of worship as the Creator of the universe. The mark of the beast also revolves around worship. Satan has introduced a counterfeit sabbath, the first day of the week, as a symbol of his authority. The final conflict between Christ and Satan focuses on who is worthy to rule the universe. Because Jesus is the Giver of life, He is worthy to be worshiped. Satan understands this truth as one of the dominant issues in the great controversy between good and evil. For this reason, Satan attacks the Sabbath, the symbol of God's creative authority.

Because of the centrality of the Sabbath in the final conflict, the law of God is preeminent in the final conflict. In this week's study, we will explore the issues in earth's last war. Revelation 14:12 declares, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*NKJV*). Christ's end-time remnant is filled with Jesus' gift of righteousness by faith, which enables His elect to keep God's commandments.

Our study this week also helps us identify fully the beast power from the sea in Revelation 13. We will discover that this power, which usurps the authority of God, gets its authority from the dragon, or Satan. This beast power grows out of the ruins of the Roman Empire and claims for itself the very prerogatives of God.

Part II: Commentary

Overview: Those who heed the messages of the three angels turn away from Babylon and its false teachings. Consequently, they are commended for two things: their obedience and having the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). They are patiently waiting for Jesus to return, which is another way of saying that they are steadfast and unshakable in their trust in God and in their obedience to His law. They will not be moved. *Gill's Exposition of the Bible* offers an enlightening statement on Revelation 14:12: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and not the inventions of men, and the traditions of antichrist, but the ordinances of the Gospel, as they were at first delivered, without any adulteration and corruption; and who kept them because they were

enjoined by God, and from a principle of love to him, and with a view to his glory: these are distinguished from the worshippers of the beast, and were preserved throughout the apostasy; these are the witnesses . . . and the remnant of the woman's seed, with whom the dragon made war by the beast.”—*Comments on Revelation 14:12*, biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/revelation-14-12.html.

Saved by grace, the remnant is distinguished from the worshipers of the beast power from the sea because of their love for Jesus and their obedience to His commandments. They have the faith of Jesus—both faith in Jesus and the quality of faith from Jesus that enables them to become overcomers. Their faith results in obedience and enables them to stand when most of the people in this world bow to the beast power from the sea. Having the faith of Jesus means to have Jesus live His life in us. On the cross, Jesus trusted His Father's love when He was unable to experience the Father's care and concern for His suffering as the world's sin bearer. The faith of Jesus, living within our hearts, enables us to trust Jesus in all of life's experiences.

Identifying the Beast From the Sea

The clues to identifying the beast power from the sea of Revelation 13 are extremely specific. In this week's study, we will discuss three of these significant identifying marks of the beast from the sea. The first clue we find concerns the origin of its power. “The dragon gave him [the beast from the sea] his power, his throne, and great authority” (*Rev. 13:2, NKJV*). Who is this dragon that gives the beast from the sea of Revelation 13 its power, throne, and authority?

We read about the dragon in Revelation 12. Revelation 12:3–5 says this “dragon”—the devil—attempted to destroy, “as soon as it was born,” the “male Child,” who was later “caught up to God and His throne” (*NKJV*), an unmistakable reference to Christ. The dragon is identified clearly in these verses. In straightforward language, God's Word tells us that the dragon is the devil, or Satan (*Rev. 12:8, 9*). None other than the archenemy of God and of man is behind the beast power that comes from the sea. But the devil works through *human* agents. Just as God works through His church, the devil works through a mammoth fallen religious institution that has rejected God's truth and turned its back on God's law. Although the dragon is *primarily* Satan, as we've just learned, so closely was Satan aligned with pagan Rome that the dragon, in a *secondary sense*, also is a symbol of the pagan Roman Empire (*compare Dan. 7:7*). Satan used pagan Rome in his attempt to destroy Jesus shortly after His birth (*Matt. 1:1–20*). Later, Satan used pagan Rome to crucify Christ:

A Roman governor, Pilate, condemned Christ to die:

Matthew 27:2, 17–26.

A Roman executioner nailed Him to the cross:

Matthew 27:27, 35.

A Roman soldier pierced His side with a spear:

John 19:34.

A Roman seal was affixed to His tomb:

Matthew 27:66.

A Roman squad of soldiers guarded His tomb:

Matthew 27:62–65.

Still later, the dragon, through pagan Rome, gave the beast from the sea his seat, or throne. This endowment happened when the Roman Emperor Constantine decided to move the capital from Rome to what came to be called Constantinople, in modern-day Turkey, leaving a power vacuum at the former throne or seat of the Caesars, the Imperial City of Rome.

“By retiring to the East, he [Constantine] left the field clear for the Bishops of Rome.” “The Papacy is but ‘the ghost’ of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the ‘grave thereof.’ ”—Arthur P. Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1862), p. 305. Thus, the beast power that arises from the sea, in Revelation 13, is the papal system of religion. We must remember here that we are talking about a system, not about individual members of that system. The beast power from the sea is not a person; it is a false religious organization.

The second clue that Revelation 13 gives us about the identity of the beast from the sea closely parallels the first clue. The power that rises out of Rome is a power that commands worship. It is a religious power. Revelation 13:3, 4 declares that “all the world marveled and followed the beast. So . . . they worshiped the beast” (*NKJV*). The organization described here is also a religious power that grows into a universal system of worship.

This observation leads us to the third clue that Revelation 13 gives in identifying the beast from the sea: blasphemy (*Rev. 13:5, 6*). According to the Bible, what is blasphemy? There were two occasions when the Lord Jesus unjustly was accused of blasphemy, thus giving us two examples from the Bible of what is meant by blasphemy: (1) if any human pretends to be, or claims to be, God or claims the privileges and prerogatives of God; and (2) if any human claims the power to forgive sins. In Jesus’ case, the accusations were unjust because He truly was, and is, God and holds all the powers and prerogatives of God—including the right to forgive us our sins. (*See John 10:33, Luke 5:21.*)

The Roman Church has two distinctive doctrines that the Bible calls

blasphemy. One is its claim to have the power to forgive sins. The other is delegating to the pope the office of God on earth.

Jesus is our true priest, and only He can forgive our sins. It is true that we are not righteous enough to appear before God. We need a mediator. The incredibly good news is we have a mediator, Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches that there is only “one Mediator between God and men” (*1 Tim. 2:5, NKJV*).

As to how the Roman Church fulfills the second Bible definition of blasphemy, let’s look at a clear statement from an authoritative Catholic source on the status of the pope: “The Pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were God, and the vicar of God. . . . Hence the Pope is crowned with a triple crown, as King of Heaven and of earth and of the lower regions. . . . The Pope is as it were God on earth, . . . chief King of kings . . . to whom has been entrusted by the omnipotent God directions . . . of the heavenly kingdom.”—Lucius Ferraris, “Papa,” article 2 in his *Prompta Bibliotheca* [“Handy Library”] (Venice, Italy: Gaspar Storti, 1772), vol. 6, pp. 26–29. Latin. Reprinted (Rome: Press of the Propaganda, 1899).

The book of Revelation exalts Jesus, identifies God’s last-day people, and reveals the identifying characteristics of the beast so that we can be prepared for the coming conflict.

Part III: Life Application

Reflect: At times, it may appear to some as if God’s condemnation of a religious organization that has done a great deal of good in the world, with its schools, hospitals, and humanitarian service, seems a little harsh and unjust. The ultimate question is not whether a religious organization has done some good. The ultimate questions are: Is this organization faithful to Jesus and the teachings of Scripture? What is behind its worldwide influence, and is it leading the world into the union of church and state that prophecy predicts? The book of Revelation reveals that, under the auspices of Rome, our religious liberties will be restricted, an economic boycott will be passed, and ultimately God’s people will experience oppression, imprisonment, and death.

Ask your class members to read aloud and discuss the following three vital points from our study this week:

1. ***Be alert to what is happening in our world. Revelation’s prophecies predict that a religiopolitical union will arise. Jesus instructed His***

disciples, just before He went to the cross, to “ ‘watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming’ ” (*Matt. 24:42, NKJV*). What does Jesus mean when He tells us to “watch”? In practical terms, how do we do that?

2. *Be prepared.* The time to prepare for earth’s final crisis is now. A crisis generally does not develop character; a crisis reveals character. Now is the time to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*). Think of a crisis you went through recently. What did that reveal to you about yourself? What areas do you need to strengthen in your walk with God as a result of that revelation of character? How do we prepare for Christ’s coming?

3. *Be active.* Jesus said, “ ‘You shall be witnesses to Me’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). If there ever were a time to be active in sharing God’s love, His Word, and His end-time message with those around us, it is today. What are ways you can share Christ’s end-time message with those around you in the coming week?
