

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Preparation for the End Time

Lesson 11. God's Seal or the Beast's Mark

Our lesson this week adequately describes our understanding of the “mark of the beast” and the “seal of God.” However, let’s explore some ideas that may bring this topic into a clearer focus through the “1888 message dynamic.”

In fulfillment of Revelation 14:6-14, God is sending a special gospel message to enlighten all people, so that those who are determined to be true to Christ can make the right decision. Thus the Sabbath of the fourth commandment will be the testing point for, or against, Christ.

The Lord, in this last-day threefold message, solemnly warns against worshipping or obeying the beast power or receiving its mark. By urging men to worship Christ as the Creator instead of worshipping the beast and his image, the threefold message strikes into the heart of the issue. It calls out a remnant who keep both the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Whether to keep the true Sabbath or the false one will be the focal point in placing the seal of God in the forehead (Rev. 7:1-3), or the mark of the beast in the forehead or in the hand (14:9-11).

If the 1888 message “is the third angel’s message, in verity,” [1] it is obvious that Evangelical concepts cannot substitute for it, because the popular Sunday-keeping churches are not proclaiming the message of the seal of God and the mark of the beast. In fact, the genuine justification by faith message of 1888 “is made manifest in obedience to *all* the commandments of God.” [2] That must include observance of the fourth commandment! Yet the Evangelical churches have generally opposed the Sabbath and sanctuary truths for the entire period of Seventh-day Adventist existence. Something somewhere does not add up. Can we find help in the Bible itself?

The third angel brings no isolated message on his own. Two angels have preceded him and he only “followed them.” The first one sets the stage, “having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth” (Rev. 14:6). Therefore the Good News must be in the third angel’s message as much as in the first angel’s.

“The seal of God” is pure gospel, and is the other side of the coin of the “mark of the beast.” John links the seal of God in Revelation 7:1-4 with the three angels’ messages of chapter 14, because both passages are concerned with finding and saving a group of people known as the “144,000.” The prophet realizes that there is no way that such a group can be prepared to stand “without fault before the throne of God” (14:5) unless that “everlasting gospel” of grace is finally understood and proclaimed in its fullness.

What is implicit here is the clearest, most powerful presentation of the Good News that has ever lightened the earth, because it must perform a work of grace never before accomplished. Never has such a group of “144,000” been prepared for withstanding Satan’s final thrust of temptation, and for translation without seeing death.

At the *General Conference Session* of 1893, A. T. Jones asked: “Which would you rather have, the completeness, the perfect fullness, of Jesus Christ, or have less than that, with some of your sins covered up that you never know of? [Congregation: “His fulness.”] But don’t you see, the Testimonies have told us that if there be stains of sin there, we cannot have the seal of God. How in the world can that seal of God, which is the impress of His perfect character revealed in us, be put upon us when there are sins about us? He cannot put the seal, the impress of His perfect character, upon us until He sees it there. And so He has got to dig down to the deep places we never dreamed of, because we cannot understand our hearts.” [3]

The “mark of the beast” is not a calamity or crisis that God brings on the earth. We are not to think evil of Him! According to Revelation 13, it is the devil who brings it as the final outworking of rebellious human history. And Heaven is powerless to prevent it. None of the horrors that prophecy predicts are what God brings; He is warning us of what human history will inevitably lead to.

Satan’s ruse will ruin the earth. It will favor the love of self with its attendant pride and arrogance. The seal of God is the sign of the cross, the experience of self being crucified with Christ through an appreciation of His love revealed there. The mark of the beast is the opposite, the badge of devotion to self-interest, a total instinctive heart-reaction against such love. It is the signal for the final collapse of any semblance of order or security on earth. We cannot now imagine the scenes of horror that the final “time of trouble” will bring.

All who receive that “mark of the beast” must ultimately involve themselves in a re-crucifixion of Christ in the person of His saints. Thus on the one hand there will come together at the end of time the full revelation of humanity’s sinful depravity, and on the other hand the full disclosure of God’s loving justice of *agape*. The third angel’s message defines the issue and catalyzes humanity into those two camps.

Obviously, it means far more than we have superficially assumed. This must be why Ellen White said: “There are but few, even of those who claim to believe it, that comprehend the third angel’s message, and yet this is the message for this time. ... Said my guide, ‘There is much light yet to shine forth from the law of God and the gospel of righteousness. This message understood in its true character, and proclaimed in the Spirit will lighten the earth with its glory.’” [4]

No one can know justification by faith in its end-time setting who does not render heart-felt obedience to *all* the commandments of God. This would indicate that Seventh-day Adventists have a better source for proclaiming justification by faith than the popular

Sunday-keeping churches' versions. [5] There can be no continued subservience to the "man of sin" (who created the spurious sabbath) if justification by faith is clearly understood in the light of the cleansing of the sanctuary.

When received and proclaimed by the corporate body of God's people, it will be like blowing the trumpet with the heavenly news, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and *His wife has made herself ready.*" (Rev. 19:7).

This Sabbath issue tests everyone. Let your love for Jesus be so true, so strong, and so compelling that you will say, "With God helping me, I will henceforth keep the seventh day which Jesus, my Savior, sanctified for me."

—*From the writings of Robert J. Wieland*

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 372; *The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 92; italics supplied.

[3] A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message – No. 17," 1893 *General Conference Bulletin*.

[4] *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, "A Call to a Deeper Study of the Word," Manuscript 15, Nov. 1888, pp. 165, 166.

[5] Cf. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 55, 56, 260, 261.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://youtu.be/rjrvKGnD2_g

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