

## The Essence of the Mark

Happy Sabbath to all.

During the past Feast of Tabernacles, which ended last Sabbath, we had something of a “back to basics” approach. We reviewed the SDA Pioneer work *Lessons on Faith*, which was for some a review, but which I hope was an enlightening and refreshing examination of the original and true Adventist approach to the “faith of Yahshua.”

I would like to continue with this “foundational” theme this week, examining our understanding of the Mark of the Beast from a very simple, but strictly Biblical, viewpoint. This should be of particular value to those who are new to studying with us, but there are a few parts that I think we have not really reviewed in many years, and it was a blessing for me to recall my earliest education as a Creation Seventh Day Adventist with regard to this very important matter for the last days.

The central verses on which most people focus when examining the Mark is in Revelation, from which we read, “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.’” (Rev 14:9-11)

Interestingly, and strangely to some people, this most serious warning in all the Bible comes from one of the three angels associated with “the everlasting Gospel” from Yahweh to mankind. (Rev 14:6) Now, we know that the word “Gospel” means “Good news.” The angels from our Father never bring anything that may be considered “bad” news, because our Father does not send us anything that is bad.

He may permit trials, He may allow us to experience circumstances designed to mature our faith, and give us a history of victory over sin; but if we are “in the faith” and as we remain in the faith, these things are not themselves bad. As Paul says, “all things work together for good” to those who are called and loved by the Almighty. (Rom 8:28)

So then, this warning, even with its stern language, is a part of the good news that our Father has sent us. Understanding and avoiding the mark is a good thing – and it must be preached with as much emphasis and clarity as Yahshua’s love for mankind and His sacrifice on our behalf. These latter aspects of the Biblical record are most commonly associated with the “Gospel,” and yet Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf is useless to us if we are deceived to the degree that we cannot understand it or accept it. The Gospel, then, must be taught in its complete form, from beginning to end, or it will have no power to prevent the “very elect” from being deceived, and led into destruction in these last days.

I am taking the time to deal with this very clearly, because Creation Seventh Day Adventists, like many groups that focus on the second coming of Christ, have been accused of “diluting” the Gospel by focusing to a certain extent on issues like judgment, sanctification through character development, and the mark of the beast. They say, “Just talk about Jesus and His love, and all these other things will fall into place.”

And yet, both the Bible and human experience have shown that an incomplete understanding of the Gospel is no Gospel at all, for those who have told us to “focus more on love,” have shown no advantage of even the most worldly and nominal of Christians in testifying to a life of victory over sin. They have not said to us, “By focusing on Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and ignoring (to a large extent) the messages of warning, I have been able to maintain a sinless life.” In fact, their testimony has often been just the opposite, demonstrating that they understand NEITHER the judgment messages that they dislike NOR the messages of love that they claim to uphold, but which would cast out all fear (1John 4:18) and keep them from falling into transgression. (Jude 1:24)

Brethren, the CSDA Church is not just one of several churches, all with equal claim to the affection of the Bridegroom. It is no virtue to merely be in the company of the Bride if one does not know who She is. All who are here should stand with us because they love Yahweh supremely, and their neighbor as themselves, which manifests itself foremost in sharing with them the “good news” about our Father – and that good news pertains both to the love of the Son as demonstrated on the cross, and the messages of solemn warning that He Himself has sent to us through the announcements of His holy messengers: the angels and their human associates. After all, the ONLY reason we know what those Gospel Angels said is because their messages were recorded by John the apostle. Heaven, brethren, works through Yah’s true people – and they are the only consistent and trustworthy channel of truth that Christ will use to unite and sanctify His Redeemed.

So then, if we can accept it, to speak about the Mark of the beast is just as much a part of the Church’s mission as evangelizing about Christ and Him crucified. Now... what is that mark?

As all who are here with us should know, Creation Seventh Day Adventists claim that the manifestation of the Mark of the Beast in our day is a law, a legal action, upheld by the United States judicial system, that seeks to give one body of individuals, the General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists, exclusive control over the name “Seventh Day Adventist,” and a number of related terms.

Now, a common reaction to this information is, “How can such a small matter be worthy of so much space, and such a strong warning, in the Book of Revelation?”

As I have pointed out to others more than once, 2000 years ago it may well have been asked, “How can such a small matter of one criminal being nailed to a Roman cross be the culmination of all of mankind’s hopes for salvation?”

Today it might also be asked, “How can such a small matter of a tiny handful of believers be the only designated messengers of the Most High God in 2013?”

It seems that it is the way of our Father to accomplish great things through small matters, that His name should be glorified, and not the human instrument. Indeed, He told the Israelites just this, saying, “Yahweh did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:” (Deu 7:7)

So then, the question that should be in the mind of genuine truth-seekers, should not be how widespread this issue is, or how many people know about it. They should not ask, “What does this or that famous preacher think about it, and how many theologians agree?” A similar error was made in Christ’s time, as

it is written, “Then answered them the Pharisees, ‘Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?’” (John 7:47, 48)

The only question that should occupy the mind of genuine truth-seekers should be, “Does this claim, that the Mark of the Beast is manifest in our day as a Trademark Law held and applied by the General Conference-led Seventh-day Adventist Church, match the Biblical principles that are provided to us for identifying such a mark?”

If, you see, this Trademark Law matches in principle what the Bible considers to be the Mark of the Beast, then no other consideration matters. No human opinions, however widely held or strongly proclaimed, should sway our acceptance of what is written in the Word of God, and what may be understood from what is written there. We expect that few will come to accept this claim. We acknowledge that it is predicted of us that we will stand, few and alone, against a world that is deceived into thinking that Yahweh is different than He declares Himself to be, that His Law is different than what He has stated it to be, and that His prophecies mean something other than what He has intended them to mean. So then, if we are going to be few, let us make sure that we are standing on a firm foundation, so that the voices of the many should not budge us from our place of rest.

What does the Bible say about Marks?

It should not be any surprise to Bible students, but Yahweh has always seen people in two general categories: those who are faithful to Him, and those who are not. Of the Day of Judgment it is written, “When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” (Mat 25:31-33)

Note that it does not say that the Son of Man will “make” all nations to be composed of either sheep or goats. It does not say that He will call some sheep and others goats on that day; no, He will simply separate mankind into two classes based on what they already are. Yahweh knows who are His, and the Day of Judgment is NOT a day on which we will be judged – it is a day that will reveal to every individual human how he is reflected, judged, in Yahweh’s perfect standard, and they will see who it is that they have been in this life.

So then, there has been a mark, invisible and spiritual though it may be, upon all who have been rebellious against the Almighty, for He knows those who are His, and knows those who are not His. This has been the case from the beginning, and so if we wish to truly understand this Mark, we should make a close examination of its first appearance in the Biblical record. That is found here:

“And Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And [Yahweh] said, ‘What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.’

“And Yahweh said unto him, ‘Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.’ And Yahweh set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.” (Gen 4:8, 10-12, 15)

Now, one might think, “This is not the same as the Mark in Revelation, because this mark protected Cain.” It is true that the mark protected Cain, but only from those who were like him – those who would settle matters with physical violence. The mark that Yahweh placed on Cain did not shield him to the least degree from divine displeasure, and in fact revealed openly to the world – to any who would be born thereafter, for mankind was long-lived in those days – that “This is the man who has slain his brother.”

Now, what is it that Cain did to earn his mark? In other words, what did the mark represent? Yes, as I said, it marked him as a murderer, but Cain was the first human being born of woman – he had the best of beginnings in terms of education in spiritual matters, hearing of the days of his parents’ origin in Eden, and from the hand of Yahweh Himself. It was no part of Cain’s psychology to doubt that Yahweh existed, or that He would judge the works of mankind. In those days there were no skeptics, no cynics, none who were irreligious or careless about spiritual things.

Every human being of those first few generations well knew their Creator, and therefore for Cain to turn and slay his brother was no small thing, nor did it happen due to an instant’s fall from grace.

Cain’s sin, Cain’s crime, was that he adopted the mindset of the first Rebel, Lucifer, such that, although he had the warm body of a human being, he had the heart (the essence, the inner-workings) of “that old Serpent.” This IS what a “beast” is, in the context of the mark of the beast, of the creature that is like “the beast that [...] shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition.” (Rev 17:8)

How can we illustrate this principle clearly from the Bible? Very simply; it describes the matter thus: “And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.” (Rev 13:11) Without going into too much “heavy” theology, Christ taught that the words that you speak reveal the true condition of your heart. He said, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.” (Mat 15:18)

So then, with regard to this “second beast,” which is a prototype, a template, for the beasts that follow it, it appears to be a lamb – warm blooded and gentle – but in reality speaks like a dragon, revealing that it has a dragon’s heart. We might say, then, as a general principle, that a beast in “human form” would be one that claims to be religious, that claims to uphold the principles of humanity and spirituality, but in reality operates according to the principles of Satan himself.

A thorough Bible study on the Adventist approach to Revelation – which is the very study that convinced me that Adventism was correct and Catholicism was false – would accomplish a great deal in terms of solidifying these ideas. For now, though, pulling back a bit from the details and just looking at the “big picture,” I would say this, that Yah calls things as they are.

That is simple enough even for children to understand. If the Faith of Yahshua is the faith that Yahshua has, then I would say that the mark of the beast is simply a mark that reveals what the bearer is. Hopefully that should make perfect sense. If I place a “stamp of approval” on something, then I approve of what it is. The “mark of Cain” revealed that, “This is Cain.” The “seal of Yahweh” reveals that, “This person belongs to Yahweh, and is like Him.”

So then, deep and detailed scholarship aside, I would suggest that the Mark of the Beast is no different than any of these. If one has the Mark of The Beast, one is revealed to belong to the Beast, and be like the beast in nature. It is a mark “of” the Beast, and therefore one who has this mark is beast-like in words, thoughts and actions.

The mark of the beast in the last days is merely the final fulfillment of that mark that began with Cain – it reveals kinship with the world (so that the world will not slay us). In fact, this is commonly what is said to those who stand against this compulsive law: “Only change your name, only submit to the judgment of the course, and we will leave you in peace.” In other words, if they see the mark on our foreheads, if they see that we follow the beast, then we will be safe, “lest any finding [us] should kill [us].”

We would be of the world, and it is written, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own.” (John 15:19)

By following the example of Lucifer, Cain did what Lucifer did – he attempted to have his own way, to erect his own standard of righteousness and, when this failed or was revealed to be false, he resorted to warfare and violence. He used force as his last resort, when “gentler” attempts at obtaining his objectives failed. Anyone, therefore, who enforces the rule of “self” will be given the mark of the beast, because they will simply be described by Yahweh as what they are.

With regard to the trademark law, we have a significant set of documentation outlining how this has developed, but a summary would reveal the actions of the General Conference Corporation to be precisely according to this pattern: They took something that Yahweh had given to all mankind, and attempted to defend and protect it according to the rule of “self.” When challenged, they attempted by coercion and threats to compel the consciences of those who believe that the only proper descriptive name for a Bible-believing Christian in this last generation is “Seventh Day Adventist.” When this did not work – and could not work, because the convictions of the true believers was strong – they resorted to the courts.

“And [the beast] causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads, and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.” (Rev 13:16-18)

I think that this basic study provides a good foundation for those who wish to look into the Mark of The Beast. There is a lot to study in these matters, a lot that might be said, a lot to tie the Mark bit-by-bit, generation-by-generation, to rebellion in human society down through the ages from Adam, through Christ, and all the way up to today. In keeping it general, and looking at principles, we can be sure that even our most detailed studies remain on the right track.

Finally, I would like to end the study with one aspect of the Mark that was particularly impressive to me when I first learned of it early in my CSDA education. The number of the beast, which is identical with its mark, is called in the verse above, “Six hundred threescore and six.” This number, 666, has been tied to all kinds of things from the Roman Catholic Pope, to Satanic cults, to this or that historical figure.

I believe that, like all matters of Biblical truth, the answer reveals itself, and is simpler than the conspiracy-theorists would have us believe. It is stated plainly that the number of the beast is the number of a “man.”

It is not a specific man, because the anti-Christ has his own prophecies; and in fact, John the apostle tells us that there are many who would oppose the teachings of our Lord, for “there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.” (1John 2:18) So, as dangerous as they are, they are not going to be a single, supernatural figure that appears on the scene and leads the world to a greater state of destruction and carnality than they already display.

What we do know is that, Biblically, all that is “complete” takes the number 7. All that is “almost” complete takes the number 6. If a human being, mind, body and spirit, is incomplete, he would be rated as “six hundred, threescore and six” in terms of his “soul,” which as Adventists know represents the complete person. The “goats” that are revealed to be goats on the day of judgment, the beasts that receive the mark identifying them as beasts, they have the number “666,” because that is what that is, the number of the “natural” man, not the “spiritual” man to whom it is written, “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” (Col 3:14, 15)

The third angel’s message, which warns human beings about the Mark of the Beast, is ultimately bringing us good news. It is news that there is a “bond of perfectness,” that not only moves us beyond the number of the “natural man,” but also calls us into One Body, so that we may be united in Christ, united against all sin, Protestants against all who would combine religion and secular force (of which the Trademark Law is merely the most recent manifestation), and therefore sealed for service in Heaven Above.