

MARK OF THE BEAST

Brian Orchard, August 14, 2015

Well, greetings everybody. Nice opportunity to be together again for the study of God's word.

Recently somebody sent me a news item that I thought was quite interesting, grabbing my attention by the headline which said, "The President of France Wants Eurozone Members to Transfer Their Sovereignty to a United States of Europe." Now, that particular news item led to others and I had been unaware of a particular discussion that has been taking place in Europe over the last several years.

One piece of information it led us to is an article that appeared in the German language in *Die Presse* and it refers to a conversion plan for an EU Member state. And what is interesting is that this article is not recent. It indicates that these discussions have been going on since 2012. Well, what discussions? Ten EU foreign ministers, including Michael Spindelegger, wants to convert the EU into a federal state modeled on the United States. The future group will reshape the political system.

Now, Michael Spindelegger at the time was either the foreign minister or the finance minister for Austria. I've seen both and I wasn't quite sure which one was correct. But, he was involved and somewhat prominent in these discussions. It says:

"The EU foreign ministers forfeited, with the new European legal basis (referring back to the Lisbon Treaty), a permanent place at the EU summit. Now, because they are stripped of power, ten of them have compiled an entirely new democratic structure for the European Union. It is a federal model like that of the United States – a parliamentary system with a directly elected EU president. The model would strip of power the heads of state dominating nowadays, and heads of the government, and create a democracy system similar to the state of the EU."

This is a rough translation from the German so excuse the grammar, but I think we get the point.

"Thus, the president of the committee should be re-valued to the directly elective head of the government who puts together his government team to himself. Because with him the development of new laws and their conversion gathered, he would be from now on the most high-powered politician of Europe."

The article says a little bit later, after listing the ten countries that were involved in these initial discussions, and – as you might have gathered from the headline I quoted – France is now involved. It was not involved in the original ten: Austria, Belgium Denmark, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

But now France has joined this discussion, making it eleven.

“Their proposals go towards a political upgraded State with more common skills, (in other words) more competence that were previously located in key areas of national policy. Thus the ten foreign ministers are in favor of a common European Border Guard, (in other words) common European protection of the borders. They recommend the expansion of the common foreign affairs and security policy up to an EU army.”

And then finally this statement:

“Their joint paper calls for not only a centralization of power, but also a greater involvement of national parliaments in the European decision-making process.”

This represents a concentration of power and the term ‘The United States of Europe’ does not appear in these articles that we can see on this subject. *The Press [Die Presse]* had put that title to it, based on the fact that it’s offering a system similar to what we have here in the United States – one federal government imposed over all of the national governments.

Turn to Revelation chapter 17, keeping some of those comments in mind, in Revelation 17 and in verse 12.

Revelation 17:12 The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.

13 These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.

Quite a remarkable comment given this particular article. The alignment of biblical prophecy and current events really should not escape our attention. As things develop we can expect the church headquartered at Rome to become more involved. And, granted, at this point in time, we are left scratching our head a little bit as to where the current pope is directing the church. But from biblical prophecy we can know that the church does have a very important part to play with what is emerging, or appears to be emerging, from the civil quarters.

In verse 3, still in Revelation 17 it says:

Revelation 17:3 ...and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

This woman representing the church does get involved with this developing civil/political power.

My point is that what is developing in Europe right now will prove to be a serious test of faith for God's people. And it's something that we can look at and be warned and prepared for, hopefully.

God has let us know in advance the things that will happen that will impact us so that we can prepare. If you look, for example, in 1 Peter chapter 1. We'll just pick it up in verse 9.

1 Peter 1:9 Receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of *your* souls.

10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come to you*,

11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into.

It's interesting that they "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." And Jesus Christ was severely tested and tried prior to being glorified and returning to sit at the right hand of God the Father. And in that sense, the Church, also, will be tested before it will be glorified because it says in verse 13:

13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

"Therefore", the thought flows on, that we should "gird up the loins of our mind." There are things that we as God's people should do.

14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

15 but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct,

16 because it is written, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"

So before Christ was glorified He was tested and He was tried. And we're very familiar with that. Before we receive glorified life in God's Kingdom we will be tested. And so, with this particular study, to give it some focus, I'd just like to ask you to consider one question. How important is God's holy Sabbath Day to you? How important is it? We will see why I asked that question as we progress here.

The Sabbath was introduced into man's world immediately after mankind was created. We come to the Sabbath Day, obviously, on the seventh day right after man was created on the sixth day. Then the Sabbath tracks right throughout the Bible and, although it's not mentioned by name, we can go to Revelation 20 and see the final day of one thousand years – what the Sabbath represents. So the Sabbath tracks its way right through the entirety of the Bible.

Now, of course, in asking how important is God's Sabbath to you I could have asked how important is God's law, but we focused on the Sabbath because the rising power in Europe will test God's people on this particular law.

Revelation chapter 13, we see here a beast rising out of the sea.

Revelation 13:1 Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.

Now, this beast that's being referred to here is a political power and I appreciated as I developed this material that I would have been well served to have given a Bible Study on just what is the beast before giving the material I'm giving tonight. But I had no time to go back and do that. So, I'll just mention that this is a political power that is coming on the world scene.

2 Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion...

And in a moment we'll see from Daniel exactly why those three things meld together into this one beast. But note here.

...The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.

So whatever is going on here, with the development of this beast and whatever impact the beast has on the world scene, Satan is the power behind it.

3 And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.

And we are waiting for the healing of this beast that comes back as a resurrected form of the Roman Empire.

4 So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast...

And that's an important element to remember here, that the world is marveling at this beast. It has some kind of very positive impact and effect on people such that they like it, they accept it, they worship it, they say:

...saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

5 And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.

He was allowed to continue to do whatever he was doing for a fairly lengthy period of time.

6 Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

Right there is a clue to some of the problems that are going to come upon God's people.

7 It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. (A world dominating authority.)

8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear.

One of the things that we have to hear is that all who dwell on the earth worship him, with one exception – those whose names have not been written in the Book of Life follow him, but those who do have their names written in the Book of Life don't follow him.

10 He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

So, here is the making of the character of God's people in preparation for entrance into the Kingdom of God at the return of Jesus Christ. This is a part of God's plan, God's process here in preparing people for His family and as I indicated earlier, there will be a time of testing.

11 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon.

12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Now we're referring to a religious church here who is in association with (we could say "riding" since we already read that previously) the first beast and it's causing the people of the earth to worship this political power.

13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.

And the dragon gives great power to this church to deceive and it's a very convincing deception when miracles are performed.

14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

15 He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Then notice verses 16 and 17.

16 He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,

17 and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

We see here the identification of a mark that is going to be caused to come upon mankind and to be accepted by mankind. And, as we've read up here, they marvel at the beast and there's really, for most people, there is no problem or no difficulty here, to be well accepted.

But, I would say here at this point since I've introduced the concept of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath, that we have seen here in recent times (and I will just say the last thirty years to give it a round figure) the fact that many people, superficially, adhere to God's law. Because we have seen within our current lifetime people who were Sabbath keepers, adherents to God's law, very quickly divest themselves of the need to keep a Sabbath. And for many of them it only took one sermon and suddenly, after that sermon, you were free to do whatever you wanted to do on the seventh day and people very quickly and very readily went to it.

The Sabbath is one of those laws that causes a great deal of discomfort in terms of the society in which we live because it requires us to stand against the flow of society in certain ways (employment is obviously the biggest thing that comes to our mind). And to have that burden removed for some people was a great and sudden freedom that they rushed to.

Well, God's people are going to be tested on this commandment of God's to keep the Sabbath holy.

The beast is the end of successive kingdoms; it's the final kingdom. Let's just look quickly at Daniel 7, picking it up in verse 1.

Daniel 7:1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head *while* on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts.

2 Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.

3 And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

And then Daniel goes through the various characteristics.

4 The first was like a lion...

5 ...a second, like a bear... (The third was)

6 ...like a leopard... (and in verse 7:)

7 "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

Now, we're not left guessing on some of these things so let us just go down the chapter a little further to verse 16.

16 I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things:

17 'Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings* *which* arise out of the earth.

And, we are told very, very clearly in Daniel chapter 2, that these are successive kingdoms. It starts off with the head of gold, then the chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass. These are successive kingdoms, as the king of Babylon is told.

Daniel 2:38 ...you are this head of gold.

39 But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom

These are successive kingdoms that are being spoken of here. Back in Daniel 7 and in verse 23:

Daniel 7:23 "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all *other* kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces.

This is a power like the world has not seen before and there have been some marvelous world powers in the past. But this is a world dominating power that is going to yet appear on the world scene

24 The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom...

The fourth beast contains the strength of all the previous empires, so that the beast we saw in Revelation 13:1 coming out of the sea had these different characteristics. They are the characteristics of the previous three kingdoms all wrapped up and become the strong points that are within this fourth kingdom.

We need to remember that this beast receives its power from Satan, from the dragon. Satan hates God's plan of developing a family and he certainly hates all that the Sabbath stands for because the Sabbath stands as a sign for God's people. The Sabbath is also a type of the millennium when Satan is bound and taken away from being able to influence mankind and mankind comes into a harmonious relationship, over this lengthy period of time, with its Creator. And so, the dragon hates everything that the Sabbath stands for.

Going back to Revelation 13 verse 15:

Revelation 13:15 He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. (And as we said)

16 He causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,

17 and that no one may buy or sell except...(you have that mark.)

The image, of course, is a counterfeit religion. It demands to be worshipped, but we note that the church only enforces the mark. The mark is not of the church, it is of the civil authority. It is the mark of the beast.

Now the mark is also recognized by God as being very important. Now, Satan, of course, the dragon, places great emphasis on this mark – but so does God. If you look at Revelation 15 verse 1:

Revelation 15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

Now we come to this point where God intervenes in the affairs of men – the Day of the Lord, where God begins then. He has allowed the dragon and his civil and religious power to have a certain amount of authority for a period of time. Now God steps into the affairs of man.

It tells us that these plagues that are going to be poured out in verse 6:

Revelation 15:6 And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues...

And what is interesting at this point, in light of what we're talking about, is the first plague in chapter 16 verse 1.

Revelation 16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

The very first act of God in His intervention on the Day of the Lord is to address those who have the mark of the beast and who worship the beast. So, it's important to God as well as it is important to Satan. So, what is this mark? Remember, it is the mark of the beast that is enforced by the church. It is not the mark of the church, but the mark of the beast.

Now, I appreciate, as you do too, that there has been a lot of speculation over the years, as to what is the mark of the beast. And, as time and technology have developed, we've been able to hone our speculations and I think some of the technology that allows microchips to be planted under the skin is probably up near the top there somewhere. We've gone through credit cards, we've gone through identity cards. There have been all kinds of things that people have put forward as to what the mark of the beast might be.

But, let the Bible tell us what the mark of the beast is. Its consequences are dire, so knowing what it is, I think, is quite important. You can't buy without it. Isn't it interesting how Satan has manipulated society? Most of us who live in towns or cities and we are taken off the land so that we cannot support ourselves. We live in cities and we are forced to depend upon what we can buy to support our lives. We go to the supermarket frequently to buy food to eat. You can't go into my back yard and pick the fruit of the trees or the vegetables that are in the backyard. They don't exist in this particular backyard.

And so, Satan has forced us into a way of living that makes us dependent upon buying to live. We're coming to a point in time where, without the mark, you will not be able to buy.

Another aspect of what's going to develop here in the future is martyrdom. The enforcement of the mark will involve martyrdom; death on account of one's beliefs.

In Revelation 13 where we've been here in verse 15, at the end of verse 15 it says:

Revelation 13:15 ...and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Now there have been martyrs in the past, history will explain that to us. But if we identify this particular martyrdom, it will show us when this mark is going to be enforced. In Revelation 6 verse 9, we come back to the fifth seal:

Revelation 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Christ will not come until another martyrdom, this is future from where we are today, will take place. In Matthew 24 and in verse 9 Christ, as you well know, is responding to the questions "What's the sign of your coming and the end of the age?"

Matthew 24:9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

Now this tribulation referred to is a specific period of time.

21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

And the extent of this tribulation is such that:

22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Now the tribulation is Satan's wrath. I've referenced here God's wrath, but that's after the tribulation. The Day of the Lord follows the tribulation. The tribulation is Satan's wrath. He knows he has but a short period of time and he turns his anger and his hostility on God's people. In Revelation 12 and in verse 12 it simply tells us:

Revelation 12:12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

And the time is closing in on Satan. God the Father only knows how much time. But it's closing in on Satan.

The tribulation is a time of Jacob's trouble. It's the time when Israel, as a physical nation, is punished and through that punishment brought back into a relationship with God and restored. But during the tribulation one very clear focus is God's Church. So God's people, both physical and spiritual, are the focus of the tribulation. Revelation 17 and in verse 6:

Revelation 17:6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

This is the woman that is riding the beast and she's drunk with the blood of the saints and blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Revelation 20 verse 4:

Revelation 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Now this verse indicates that the mark is not something new. There is no specific reference here to just those who were killed prior to the end. It's those who have, at any point in time, have been killed because they didn't worship the beast nor receive his mark in their foreheads or on their hands.

It has been an issue during past martyrdoms and will become an issue again. That is the point. It will become an issue again. And just simply the context of the seven last plagues tells us that.

What is clear is that they have obeyed God rather than man; those who are involved in this martyrdom have obeyed God rather than man. They have refused to worship either the beast or the image. And so, the key point here is that the mark involves obedience – either obedience to Satan or obedience to God, however you want to put that.

Revelation 14 verse 9:

Revelation 14:9 Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand,

10 he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. (Is the beast and the mark important to God?) **He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.**

11 And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Those who receive the mark are disobeying God. They are breaking a commandment or commandments. They have obeyed the dragon and the civil authority that Satan has empowered. They have obeyed that source, but they have disobeyed God. The distinction is that one group accepts the mark of the beast and another group keeps the commandments of God.

Now, the commandment issue is reinforced here in an interesting way in Revelation chapter 15. We'll just look at the first three verses. This aspect of obedience is important. Of course this is where the testing factor comes in.

Revelation 15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues (as we've just read), for in them the wrath of God is complete.

2 And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

Now if you go back to a previous chapter, I believe it's chapter 5, you'll see that the sea of glass is in reference to the throne of God. So, in vision, we're seeing here a group of people who have victory over the beast, over his image, coming into a relationship with the Father. In verse 3:

3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: (And then the song continues.)

I find this reference to Moses and Christ at this particular point in time quite interesting, because there are types here. And John, of course, is the same author who wrote in 1 John chapter 1, I believe it's verse 17, where he said that "the law came by Moses and grace and truth by Jesus Christ."

So there are types here. Moses was a type of Christ. He led God's people out of a system that is the type of a system that rules mankind and keeps him in bondage. Egypt was a type. Pharaoh was a type of the beast.

At this point God is about to pour out the bowls of the wrath of God onto this Babylonian system just as he poured out the plagues upon Egypt. So it's just an interesting point being made here, just a very simple statement, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

The children of Israel stood before the Red Sea and God miraculously delivered them and here we see the saints standing before the sea of glass. The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb picture the combination of God's law, God's commandments and the faith and the salvation from sin represented by the Lamb.

Those with the mark testify to the beast and his image. Those without the mark testify to God and His word. Revelation 12 again and verse 10:

Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

These people had a vision. They had a vision of God's family relationship. They had a vision of the Kingdom of God. They had a vision beyond this life that sustained them, that nourished them and of course, the blood of the Lamb refers to being able to receive the Spirit and the power of God, which is a Spirit and power greater than the spirit and power that the dragon has. These people had a view of God and a family relationship with God that took them above the physical existence of this life and they were able "not to love their lives unto death."

12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Testimony is evidence given. I will be staying with Revelation somewhat, but let's go for now to Luke 24 verse 27, thinking about the testimony:

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Those who do not receive the mark, Satan's brand, will be the center of Satan's wrath in the tribulation. These people keep God's commandments and live by every word of God – the written testimony of Jesus Christ. Satan's wrath is directed toward those who are obedient, that is obedient to God. And God's wrath is directed towards those who are disobedient.

In one sense you could say God's people will be put between a rock and a hard place. It will be a very severe test. Either you obey Satan and you're able to buy and sell, you're able to eat, you're able to feed your family, or you obey God and you can't do those things and maybe have to give your life for your obedience to God.

And I say that not wanting to stress or make you anxious, but to say how important it is that God's law be a part of who we are, not just an intellectual understanding but an intense part of our being. It's very, very important to understand that aspect.

In Ephesians 5 verse 1:

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Be imitators of God as little children – come into a childlike relationship with the Father. Then it tells us the things to put away. When He talks of Babylon He says, “Come out of her my people.”

3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness... (and all of these things)

4 neither filthiness... (have no part in being an imitator of God. Those things are to be put away.)

Then in verse 6 it says:

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

And Satan has been able to convince the world that God’s law is not important. Part of the aspect of the Sabbath is based upon the aspect of people looking at it as a ‘Jewish’ day. People assume: “It’s not a part of the New Testament. It’s just a Jewish day. And God’s law has been done away with.”

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things (And it’s just mentioned there in a very compact three verses what these things are.) **the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**

We are living testimonies of the Father and Christ. We are not to be living representatives of disobedience to God’s commandments. As we’ve seen, the first plague is on those who have obeyed the beast and his image.

Colossians 3 and in verse 5:

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

This is why our lives now are really at a critical period of time. Now is a preparation for withstanding Satan’s wrath. We can talk about it and we can have an intellectual concept of it, but now is the time to prepare because, I promise you, just look at the last thirty years. An intellectual acceptance of God’s law is not going to sustain you through this period of time in the future. God’s law is going to have to be deeply inside you and it’s going to be *who you are*, because that is what will sustain you.

Now is the time to put to death those things that are mentioned here. Overcoming, engaging God’s way of life – and I like to put it that way because that’s not superficial. *Engage* God’s way of life with a deep emotional bond.

Now, while we have the peace and the quiet to do it. These things are not in play, yet. We're not being persecuted. We're not being martyred at this point in time. This is a time of preparation.

Zephaniah chapter 1 verse 14:

Zephaniah 1:14 The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out.

15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

16 a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. (It's an intense period of time as God begins to deal with mankind. But why?)

17 "I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the (Eternal) Lord..."

Sin is the transgression of God's law. And God's wrath is poured out in this incredible volume. There's been nothing like it before.

17 ...because they have sinned against the (Eternal) Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse."

The Day of the Lord, God's intervention after the tribulation, is simply "because they have sinned". Now James adds God's approach to sin, or an element of God's approach to sin, by telling us in James 2 and in verse 10:

James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

It does not have to be a total rejection of all of God's laws. To break one, in God's eyes, is the same as breaking them all. The penalty, of course, is the same.

Let's summarize a little at this point, some of the points that we have covered here.

- 1) The mark means the rejecting and breaking of God's commandments and to break one is to be guilty of all.

So we don't necessarily have to be talking here about the rejection of *all* of God's commandments. Just the rejection and breaking of one would be sufficient.

- 2) The author of the mark is the civil authority, not the religious authority.

And at this point I'd just like to insert a little information that I find quite interesting. This is taken from *The Encyclopedia Britannica, the eleventh edition*.

The earliest recognition of the observance of Sunday as a legal duty was a constitution of Constantine in 321 AD.

He was a Roman Emperor. He was not the pope. And so the earliest recognition requirement to observe Sunday came from the civil authority, not the religious authority. It developed from him and successive emperors after him. We come down here to the time of Justinian.

Pleasure was forbidden as well as business.

Business was forbidden. After the time of Justinian, the observance of Sunday appears to have become stricter.

“We decree that all Sundays be observed and that all unlawful work be abstained from, so that in them trading or legal proceedings be not carried out.”

So we have business and we have trading being condemned as not being associated with the Sabbath.

This book, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* has got an interesting few comments. Here is the fact that Sunday is set by the civil authority.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors that influenced Sunday's taking on the character of a Christian day of rest is to be found in the activities of Emperor Constantine the Great in the early fourth century followed by later Christian emperors.

Not only did Constantine give Christianity a new status within the Roman Empire, from being persecuted to being honored, he also gave Sunday the status of being a civil rest day. His famous Sunday law of March 7, 321 reads:

"On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. (Places of work were to be closed that day.) In the country however persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits". (Because, obviously, somebody felt they needed to be able to have food to eat, so that was okay.)

The question arises, how did the christian church react to such civil legislation making Sunday a day of rest? Well, the earliest church council to deal with Sunday as a day of rest was a regional one, meeting in Laodicea about 364 AD. Now we come to the image of the beast, now we come to the church. It says:

Although this Council still manifested respect for the Sabbath as well as Sunday in special scripture readings it nonetheless stipulated the following in its Canon number 29:

"Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord's Day they shall especially honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing (that is keeping the seventh day Sabbath) they shall be shut out from Christ." (Or another way it is written, "declared an anathema from Christ.")

So now we have the image of the beast enforcing the mark of the beast, but the mark has been set by the civil authorities.

Again summarizing:

- 3) The church (the image of the beast) caused people to receive the mark.
- 4) The dragon, Satan, give the beast its power and authority. It's a political instrument in Satan's hand.
- 5) Those who refuse this mark are prohibited from buying or selling. Although employment is not specifically mentioned, it's not difficult to see how that would affect a person's employment.

You can see some of the emotional power that is involved in this; for example you are a head of a family. You're a husband, you've got a wife and you've got children and you will see them hungry, you'll see them needing food and you don't have the means to go out and buy it or provide it for them because you don't have the mark of the beast.

- 6) Many who refuse the mark will be martyred.
- 7) The mark originates in the paganism of the Roman Empire. Constantine, of course, blended his worship of the sun with the christian worship of the Son. You can see many accounts of this in books of the history of the church.

The *one commandment* that fits all of this criteria is, of course, the fourth commandment – “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Eternal your God.”

The word ‘mark’ means a scratch or etching, a stamp or a badge. It identifies those who have the mark. Now it says “they receive it on their right hand or in their forehead.” So is this a physical application that is being discussed here?

Well, to understand this application of the mark, let's see God's intent for the Sabbath. Let's go back to Exodus chapter 31 pick it up in verse 12:

Exodus 31:12-17 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

13 "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep...

And here it is Sabbaths – plural. The holy days, of course are Sabbaths and they are going to be a part of this mix as well.

...for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the Lord who sanctifies you.

14 You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; (We see that factor coming up regarding the Day of the Lord) for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.

15 Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

16 (It is) ...a perpetual covenant.

17 It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever...

The word 'sign' means a signal, a flag, a beacon or a mark. Is a sign, a physical, exterior sign, something that God requires to put in our hand or to put on our forehead? Exodus 13 verse 9:

Exodus 13:9 It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt.

And this reference here is to a holy day – “Remember this day when you went out of Egypt.” And it is saying “it is a sign to you on your hand, a memorial between your eyes that the law may be in your mouth.” – internalized, not just simply an exterior dressing.

Deuteronomy 6, verse 1.

Deuteronomy 6:1 “Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess, (Drop down to verse 5.)

5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

That's where God wants His law to be. And He has given us the ability to have those laws written in our heart. And He said:

7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

God is dealing here with Israel, the physical nation of Israel. The intent of His law is to be in their heart, but He gives them reminders. Deuteronomy 11, verse 18:

Deuteronomy 11:18 “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

The physical, exterior trappings we can still observe with Judaism, were to serve as reminders of the need to obey God's commandments. The exterior trappings were symbolic. Let's look at Proverbs 7, verses 2 and 3. I do want to go through to the book of John, but first look at Proverbs chapter 7, verses 2 and 3.

Proverbs 7:2 Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye.

3 Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Well, why don't we have little boxes on our hands? Why don't we have little straps with things in the middle of our forehead? I suppose you could even throw into the mix here the tassels that God commanded they were commanded to wear at that time. Well, the reason is in John 14, verse 26. Christ promised a Helper. That Helper is the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, It will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

God's Spirit allows God's law to be written in our heart and in our mind. We don't need the physical trappings of a box on our hand or whatever it is. We have the Holy Spirit, whereas Israel did not. God's sign is to be written on our heart and our mind.

The mark of the beast is Sunday observance, the rejection of God's Sabbath day. It has been enforced in the past and it will be enforced again in the future.

We are about to enter the final Holy Day season for this particular calendar year. There will be four Holy Days in quick succession. These Holy Days are very important markers for God's plan of salvation along, of course, with the weekly Sabbath that we'll continue to observe right through this period of time. They are signs between God and His people "that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you."

This period of time we're coming into [the Fall Holy Day season}, we come into with peace; we can be very grateful to our Father for that. We're anticipating traveling to the place where God has placed His name. We'll be observing these days together. And they're very significant markers of God's plan of salvation. But they're not casual observances.

Brethren, we've got to take these days and write them deep inside us as to who we are, because one day you may well be tested on whether or not you will accept the mark of the beast so that you may buy or sell, that you may sustain your physical life because to reject the mark of the beast and to reject the worship the image of the beast may mean your physical death. It will mean your spiritual life, but the test will be along those lines.

Revelation 1 and in verse 1 where John tells us that what we've just read about here today is:

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants...

We are privileged to be able to read the book of Revelation and understand it and see some of the implications for the future from it.

...things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John,

2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

3 Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

The word 'keep' is interesting. Not only do we read and we hear, but we have to *keep*. It means a watch, to guard, keeping the eye upon. Let us watch and guard, let us keep our eye upon God's holy Sabbath day because by doing that we will be prepared for the time which is near.

And what we've read about here today is a time that is near. Once again we will see the enforcement of Sunday worship and for those who wish to keep God's holy Sabbath day it will be a time of severe test. Let us prepare for that time now and let us embrace God's Sabbath and let us make it really a deep part of who we are. ❖