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3ABN BIBLE STUDY GUIDES
Searching Deeper

MARK OF ALLEGIANCE

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When two teams are competing in a game, it's easy to tell which side the players are on. It's not their faces or the numbers on their backs that tell you which team they play for. You distinguish one side from the other because they wear different colors and their uniforms have a recognizable logo that represents their team. In the spiritual conflict over each person's life, there are only two teams. Before Jesus returns to rescue those who have chosen God's winning team, there will be no confusion about which side each person has chosen. The distinction between God's friends and His enemies will be even more obvious than the colors and logos of an earthly team.

1 What is the core issue that God cares about most?

Matthew 22:37–38 "'Jesus said to him,"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment.'"

> God sees through everything on the outside, down to this core issue: Do we love Him more than anything else? Not because we have to, but from the heart, because we know what He is really like. "… ' … Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'" (1 Samuel 16:7).

2 Does God care about our actions, as well as our heart?

John 14:21 "'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me….'"

> God cares about our actions because they express what is in our heart. Without obedience, there is no genuine love for God. "'You will know them by their fruits …'" (Matthew 7:16).

3 How will God distinguish who truly loves Him from the heart in the final days before Jesus returns?

Revelation 7:2–3 "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.'"

> In the last days before Jesus returns, God's true servants will receive His end-time seal on their foreheads, identifying them as His loyal friends. The Holy Spirit is given as a seal to God's believers at all times to firmly settle us into Bible truth (Ephesians 1:13-14). For those who are alive when Jesus returns, the specific sealing of the Holy Spirit is a sign that distinguishes those who genuinely love Him from those who don't.

4 Is God's seal on the forehead a physical mark on the skin?

The seal on the forehead is not a physical mark, because everyone who receives God's seal is also described as "having His Father's name written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1). The "Father's name" is not a tattoo, but the identifying character of God that shows we are His (2 Chronicles 6:6). "The seal of the living God" is fixed in the front of the mind, where moral decisions are made. God's identifying seal is united with His law, which He places in the mind of anyone who wants to reflect His character in their life. "'… I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them'" (Hebrews 10:16). "'Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my

disciples'" (Isaiah 8:16). When the Holy Spirit leads us to treasure God's law and His character in our thoughts, obedience comes from the heart. This is why His seal is not placed on our hand, which represents our actions (Ecclesiastes 9:10), since outward obedience doesn't always come from our heart (Matthew 7:21–23).

5 What command in God's law is the sign that the Holy Spirit has settled the end-time believers fully into God's truth and His character?

Ezekiel 20:12 "'Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.'"

> God's seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) is the outward sign that especially reveals loyalty to God from a heart of love. Embracing His sign of the Sabbath is also His seal, revealing our connection to Him. God's sign in the time of Abraham was also His seal: "And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised …" (Romans 4:11).

6 Why is the Sabbath God's sign and seal, instead of another commandment?

Exodus 31:17 ""It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth ...."""

> God's command to rest on the seventh-day Sabbath is His seal of authority, because it is a weekly, worldwide memorial that the Lord God is the Creator and has authority over all created beings in Heaven and on Earth. God shared the gift of the Sabbath in the garden of Eden so it would be for every descendant of Adam and Eve. To all people, God says, "'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. ... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it'" (Exodus 20:9–11). The fourth commandment begins with, "'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy'" (Exodus 20:8), so we would never forget that on the final day of Creation week, "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:3).

7 What method does Satan use to oppose God's authority as our Creator?

2 Corinthians 11:14 "... For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light."

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> Satan opposes God by introducing counterfeits of what He gives us. He substitutes God's light of truth with the darkness of deception. That's why Jesus called Satan the "father of lies" (John 8:44 NASB). Satan counterfeits God's prophets (Jeremiah 14:14), His apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), His miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:9), and even His Law (Matthew 15:9). He will also counterfeit God's end-time seal. A counterfeit is deceptive because it is similar to the original, and Satan's counterfeit will mislead someone who is unfamiliar with God's authentic seal.

8 How will Satan counterfeit God's seal that identifies those who love Him?

Revelation 13:16 "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."

> Satan has an identifying mark that resembles God's seal on the forehead. It is called the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:17). It is the sign of authority for the earthly power represented by the sea beast of Revelation 13:1–8.

9 Will the beast's counterfeit mark be visible on the hand or the forehead?

The beast's counterfeit will be a direct contrast to God's description of how we are to treasure His commandments.

Deuteronomy 6:6, 8 (emphasis supplied) "'And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall bind them as a <u>sign on your hand</u>, and they shall be as <u>frontlets between your eyes</u>.'"

> The love of God and His law will be evident both in the hand (representing our actions) and the forehead (representing our thoughts and motives). In contrast, the evidence of the beast's mark will be seen either

in the actions or in the thoughts and motives. Some will be marked as followers of the beast because they are sincere supporters of the beast's counterfeit commands. Others who receive the beast's mark may talk about loving God's law, but when they have to choose between God's commandments or the beast's counterfeit, they are persuaded to disobey God with their actions.

10 What is the solemn consequence of receiving the beast's mark?

Revelation 14:9–10 "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, 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….'"

It is essential to know the difference between God's seal and the beast's counterfeit mark. Before Jesus returns, the true loyalties of all people will be brought into the open when plagues fall "upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image" (Revelation 16:2). Finally, anyone who receives the beast's mark will not be shielded by God's mercy "in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5).

11 Will God condemn someone for receiving an identifying mark that is mysterious and unknowable?

Deuteronomy 30:19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life …."

"God intends for His warning messages to be understood."

God intends for His warning messages to be understood. "If anyone has an ear, let him hear" (Revelation 13:9). God gave clear instructions to Adam and Eve about which tree they must eat from to preserve life, as well as which tree would bring death (Genesis 2:16–17). About God's Law, Moses said, "'For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off'" (Deuteronomy 30:11). Today, God wants us to learn what the beast's distinct mark is, so we will not be caught off guard when religious teachers present a substitute in place of what is true.

12 Why would someone accept the beast's mark if it results in plagues and destruction?

Revelation 13:16–17 "He causes all … to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, 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."

When following God completely results in restricting their financial freedom, many people will accept the beast's mark in exchange for their convenience and the safety of their families. Satan used threats against the life of the righteous man named Job to pressure him to let go of His loyalty to God. "So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life'" (Job 2:4).

13 What is the symbolic beast whose mark is a counterfeit of God's Sabbath?

The beast's mark is the sign of authority used by the beast arising from the sea in Revelation 13:1–8. This earthly power is papal Rome, also called the Roman Catholic Church (see Lesson #21). God is identifying the religious system, not the honest-hearted men and women within that organization who follow God based on all the Bible truth they understand.

14 What does the Roman Catholic Church claim to be the mark of its authority?

Daniel 7:25 """He shall speak pompous words against the Most High … and shall intend to change times and law…."""

Human laws change all the time, but God's law does not change (Matthew 5:18). The Roman Catholic Church claims to have the authority to change God's Law. The evidence, or mark, of this claim is that it attempted to replace God's command to remember the seventh day of the week—Saturday—with the tradition of honoring the first day—Sunday. God said, "Remember the Sabbath day" and "the seventh day is the

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> Sabbath of the Lord your God" (Exodus 20:8, 10). Yet, by following the teaching of the Catholic Church, nearly all Christians have forgotten the seventh day by making it a common work day, and by considering Sunday to be God's holy day.

15 Is it unjust criticism to point out a specific church organization, or are we simply pointing out what the Roman Catholic Church openly claims?

The Roman Catholic Church officially teaches about this attempted change of God's Sabbath, and it is an important part of its history and doctrines. Consider this comparison of God's Word with what is taught in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church:*

> **The Bible says** that "the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work" (Exodus 20:10).
>
> **By contrast, the Catholic Church teaches** that "We all gather on the day of the sun, for it is the first day" (*Catechism,* 1997 ed., 2174). "On Sundays … the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God …" (*Catechism,* 2185).
>
> **The Bible says** that the Lord's day in Revelation 1:10, is the seventh day. God called His day "the Sabbath of the Lord your God" (Exodus 20:10). In Isaiah 58:13, God called the Sabbath "My holy day." Then, Jesus called Himself the "Lord even of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8).
>
> **The Catholic Church teaches** that the Lord's day is Sunday, "... no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day …" (*Catechism,* 2175).
>
> **The Bible says** that the seventh-day Sabbath is part of God's Ten Commandments. Spoken by His voice and written in stone by His finger, they cannot be changed by man (Exodus 20:1, 31:18; Malachi 3:6; Matthew 5:18).
>
> **The Catholic Church attempts to change the Law of God.** "Sunday is expressly distinguished from the sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the sabbath" (*Catechism,* 2175). "Sunday worship fulfills the moral command of the Old Covenant, taking up its rhythm and spirit in the weekly celebration of the Creator and Redeemer of his people" (*Catechism,* 2176).
>
> This new teaching that claims to have changed God's Sabbath is a claim of divine authority. The beast from the sea, representing papal Rome, is described as having "on his heads a blasphemous name" (Revelation 13:1) and "speaking great things and blasphemies" (Revelation 13:5). Remember that blasphemy is when a human tries to take the place of God (John 10:33).

16 How did such a blatant change from the seventh day to the first day occur?

Matthew 15:9 ""And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.""

> The change was the result of allowing human opinions to take the place of what God said in the Bible. **The Bible says** "not to think beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).
>
> **The Catholic Church teaches** that church traditions and leaders have equal authority with God's Word. "...The Church to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence'" (*Catechism,* 82).
>
> Although no single person set out to make such a drastic change to God's Law, the traditions of some early converts to Christianity were accepted as common practice. One pagan practice was to honor the sun by worshiping on the first day of the week. This non-Biblical practice was gradually accepted in the church and blended with God's instruction until it became an accepted tradition in the fourth century A.D. Jesus told the religious leaders who replaced God's law with their own commands that they were "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down" (Mark 7:13).

17 Why does God care about something that seems as inconsequential as which day we choose to honor Him?

Romans 6:16 "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"
Revelation 13:4 "So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'"
Matthew 6:24 "'No one can serve two masters ….'"

> Our choice to honor the seventh day or the first day shows whose authority we obey and who we worship. Will we accept the authority of the Creator, or the power that claims to change God's law? Satan tempted Jesus to worship him in place of God. "Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve"'" (Matthew 4:10). If we will not obey God out of love here on Earth, we would not obey Him in Heaven. We would not be happy in His presence, where there is nothing but loving obedience. "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

18 Does someone who worships God on Sunday have the mark of the beast right now and not know it?

The good news is that no one can give you the mark of the beast without your consent. In God's kingdom, everything is by choice. Jesus doesn't force us to love Him; He knocks at the door of our heart and we must choose to let Him in (Revelation 3:20). Every day, we make choices that either strengthen our loyalty to God, or our willingness to compromise, even though we know God's will. The time will come when another beast that represents a new earthly power "causes all … to receive a mark," and compels people to make a deliberate, informed decision of loyalty so that "no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark" (Revelation 13:16–17). Then, the choice to observe Sunday in place of God's Sabbath will be a sign of allegiance to human authority. The sign we accept—the beast's mark, or God's seal—will reveal the loyalty that is already in our heart. (To learn what the Bible says about the nation that will enforce the mark of the beast, continue to Lesson #23.)

19 How can I make sure that I don't receive the mark of the beast?

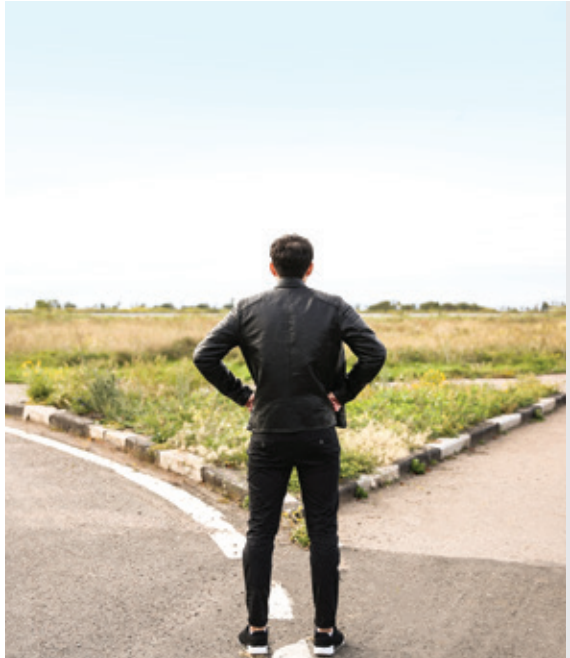
Luke 11:13 "'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'"
Revelation 14:12 "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

> No one who has received the Holy Spirit as a seal will also receive the mark of the beast. "… And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9 NIV). By responding to the Holy Spirit's prompting in their thoughts and in the Bible, God's saints will obey His commandments even when they disagree with the commands of men. God's loyal friends won't obey God because they are stronger or better than other people. It is only through their faith in Jesus that they will "have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark" (Revelation 15:2).

20 What is God's invitation to all people before Jesus comes?

Revelation 14:7 "…'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.'"

> God pleads with us to worship the Creator only, with godly fear that does not result in terror, but loving respect. God's pattern of worship is a genuine relationship with Him—a relationship of trusting obedience to all His commands, even His Sabbath.



"Every day, we make choices that either strengthen our loyalty to God, or our willingness to compromise, even though we know God's will."

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY LIFE TODAY?

1. When Peter and the apostles had to choose between obeying God or following the instructions of the religious leaders, they responded, "'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:29). Today the majority of Christians follow the tradition of the non-biblical sabbath on the first day, but many of those believers long to know and obey what is true in the Bible. What will you choose?

2. Lesson #10 showed us that God's Sabbath is a precious blessing to enjoy, not a burden. "... His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). What Sabbath habits and activities will draw you closer to God to enjoy His blessing?

3. When obeying God involves a difficult choice, how can you emphasize the blessing of obedience, instead of focusing on what you must give up?

4. When we surround ourselves with what is genuine, we counteract the counterfeit and neutralize its power to deceive. How will you surround yourself with learning more about God's law of love? Will you ask Him to lead you to godly teachers who love the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus?

5. Who do you know that needs to hear what you have learned? "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

Additional Notes:

WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS FOR ME IN THIS MARK OF AUTHORITY?

1. God gives us His power to accept God's seal and refuse the beast's mark. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

2. Jesus chose what is right, even when it caused suffering; and we can follow His example. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

3. We can trust God's instructions in the Bible because God's law does not change. "'Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock'" (Matthew 7:24–25).

4. When we honor God's Sabbath, we enjoy what He has blessed. "'For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it'" (Exodus 20:11).

5. At all times in the past, and still today, God has people who are loyal to Him. You are not alone when you obey God. "… Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 'Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life'? But what does the divine response say to him? 'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal'" (Romans 11:2–4).

6. God knows what is in our hearts. "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Timothy 2:19).

7. We don't need to judge the hearts of others, because God will reveal each person's choice at just the right time. "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10).

8. Anyone who truly loves the truth will not be deceived by the mark of the beast. "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10).

LESSON SUMMARY

1. God's loyal followers receive the Holy Spirit as a seal in their forehead.

2. The end-time sign of being sealed by the Holy Spirit is seen in obedience to the Sabbath commandment.

3. Satan has a counterfeit of God's seal: it's called the mark of the beast.

4. The beast of Revelation 13:1–8, representing the earthly power of papal Rome, claims the authority to change God's law.

5. Papal Rome claims that the mark of its authority is its attempt to change God's Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week.

6. The mark of the beast is a choice of loyalty to human authority, instead of to God, when forced to choose between God's seventh-day Sabbath worship or the Sunday worship counterfeit.

7. Our choice of the seventh day or the first day is important because it demonstrates who we choose to worship.

Additional Notes:

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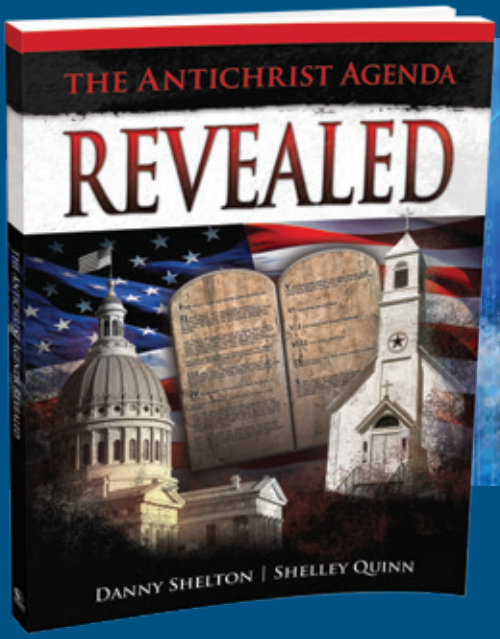

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