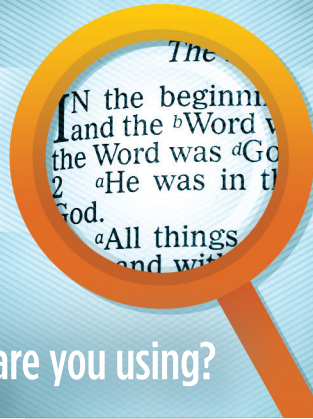


BIBLE



OPTICS

What lens are you using?

The **WORD** or the world?

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From the Pastor

Many scoff at the idea that the Sabbath day will be an end-time test. Have we forgotten that God tested Adam and Eve with a tree? Why can't He test us with a day? It is one of the Ten Commandments after all.

After listening to the words of the serpent, Eve decided to disobey God's command. Eating of the forbidden fruit gave evidence of her rebellion.

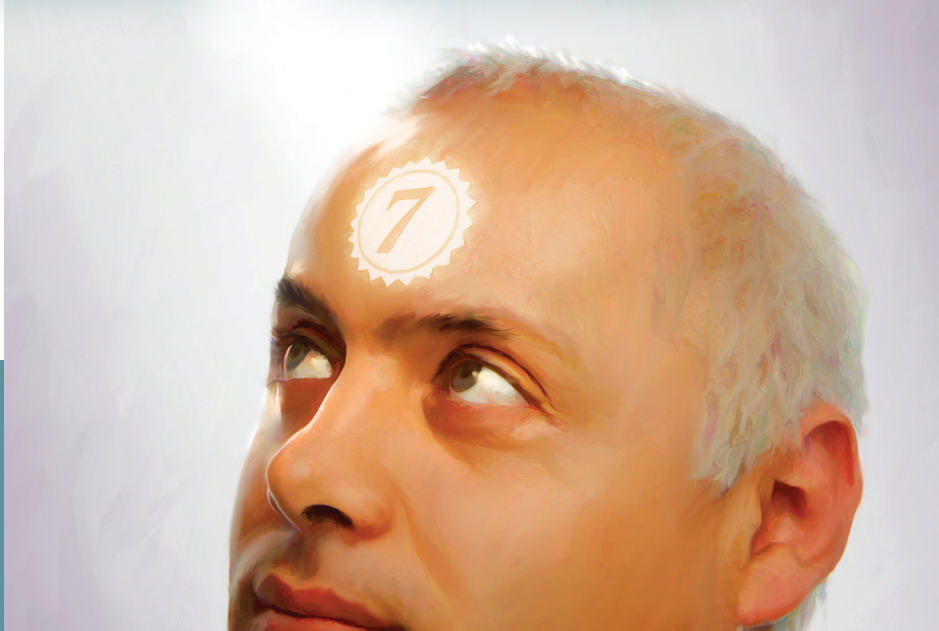
The world will soon face another simple test. Like the one in the garden, it starts with the heart.

This final test is what the Third Angel's Message is all about. The acceptance of this message, along with those of the first two angels, will result in a people who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

NOTICE

This is the last issue of Bible Optics. It has been our privilege to create Bible Optics over the last year and we pray the articles have strengthened your faith in God and His Word. If you've missed any, we hope you will go back and read them now.

We will be shifting our focus to preparing a church revitalization program that will be rolled out for churches in the Kentucky Tennessee conference later in 2022. We're excited about where God is leading and will keep you posted as plans develop.



Loyalty and “the Mark”

When I was young, my parents led my family from worshiping on Sunday to keeping the biblical Seventh-day Sabbath. I had no idea why at the time. We started attending a Seventh-day Adventist church and keeping the Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. We stopped shopping, going to the movies, and making other people work on Saturday. No longer was the day about cleaning and schoolwork, it was about quality time with God, our family, and nature. Try explaining that to your friends in public school!

The Sabbath meant I got to be with my parents in the most real, most “together” way. We were committing an entire day to God as a family. Sunday never meant that to me, but the Biblical Sabbath did. I didn't know it at the time, but the reason I felt that was because God has placed unique significance on the seventh-day Sabbath.

God has set a meeting time with His people every Sabbath. If we don't make the Bible our planner, we'll miss the meeting thinking any day will work. Oops! If eternity is at stake, that is a major error.

This is what the Third Angel's Message is all about. The Sabbath is a sign of loyalty to God, as much as it is His gift of rest. Keeping the Sabbath, truly living the Sabbath as intended, becomes a sign right back to God that we intend to be His—every week—and forever.



Nelson Mercado | Pastor
Nashville First Seventh-day Adventist Church

“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. 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 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. HERE IS THE PATIENCE OF THE SAINTS; HERE ARE THOSE WHO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD AND THE FAITH OF JESUS.”

REVELATION 14:9-12

Highlighting God's Seal?

From the very beginning, closeness to God has been the capstone of all of God's work. In Genesis, God rested with Adam and Eve on the seventh-day of the week after He created the world. In the Gospels, Jesus spent quality time with His people each Sabbath, modeling how we are to connect to God each week.

The Sabbath is the highlight of the Ten Commandments for it is where we find the seal of God's covenant. The fourth commandment details the Author (Lord your God), the basis for His authority (He is the Creator), and His jurisdiction (the heavens, earth, and sea). It is also the only commandment God specifically says to “remember”.

God's sealing gift has been especially attacked by His archenemy. Satan has led us to forget, change, and ignore it through the centuries. But God's Word tells us this won't always be the case. The Third Angels Message warns us that a day is coming when our loyalties will be revealed by the day we choose to worship. The mark of the beast will be given to those who ignore God's call to keep the Sabbath by “keeping it holy” and focusing on our Creator (Exodus 20:9-10).

“The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controversial. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the

line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other, choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God” (Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, 1911, p. 605)

God gave us the Sabbath to spend with Him. He wrote it into our routine for rest, giving us the gift of connection with Him. He also commanded us to keep it as a sign of our loyalty to Him which sets apart His people from the beginning onto the end of time.

Looking back, I'm thankful for the choice my parents made to worship God on the Sabbath as a family. It demonstrated to the world and God that we wanted to be His and that we were willing to obey the truth. We were God's bannermen.

By Megan Ehrhardt



HOW NOT TO RECEIVE THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Cain was furious. Why did Abel insist on sacrificing a lamb? Why wouldn't his younger brother follow his example? His rigid obedience was more than Cain could stand. "Let us go out to the field," he said. We all know what happened next. Cain killed Abel for "choosing to obey God instead of joining in rebellion against Him" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 73).

Then God "put a mark" on Cain. This mark prefigures an end-time mark—the infamous "mark of the beast." People have speculated about this mark for centuries. We are told that the "beast" will attempt to force all to receive it (Revelation 13:16). Those who refuse will experience bitter persecution; they will not be able to buy or sell (Revelation 13:17). Some will even be put to death (Revelation 13:15; 14:13).

On the other hand, the third angel's message warns of something much more terrifying for those who bow to the beast and receive his mark—the "wine of the wrath of God" (Revelation 14:10; see Q&A "What is 'the Wine of the Wrath of God?'" on page 6).

What is the mark of the beast? How can we avoid receiving it?

To the surprise of many, the Bible answers these questions with incredible clarity. But before we look at them, we need to understand another less talked about mark—the seal of God (Revelation 7:2–4; 9:4).

The Seal of God

God tested the Hebrew's loyalty soon after He delivered them from Pharaoh's grip. They had all experienced His mighty power. Their miraculous deliverance proved that they could trust Him, but would they?

As they journeyed through the wilderness, Yahweh provided manna six days a week. The Israelites were to gather only enough for each day. On the sixth day, they were to gather a double portion and then rest on the seventh in honor of the One who sustained them. Obedience to the Sabbath commandment was to be a visible expression of their inward faith. This special day of worship set them apart as a peculiar people. It would perpetually remind them of whom they worshipped and why they worshiped Him.

"Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12). The seventh-day Sabbath declared to the surrounding nations that Israel worshiped Yahweh, the one and only Creator-God.

When we look at the fourth commandment as spoken from Sinai, it becomes obvious that the seventh-day Sabbath has been a mark of God's authority from the beginning. God states, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" and then proceeds to recount how He created the world in six days, rested on the seventh, and then set it apart as blessed (Exodus 20:8–11). The Sabbath is the unmistakable sign that points to the source of God's authority—He is the Creator. "Him who made heaven and earth" (Revelation 14:7).

We are told that faithful believers will receive the "seal of God" in their foreheads (Revelation 7:2–4; 9:4). A seal in the forehead symbolizes true belief which results in observance of its visible counterpart—the seventh-day Sabbath.

Who's the Beast?

"If anyone worships the beast and his image..." Revelation 14:9



Last month we established that Babylon is a codeword for the Roman Catholic church-state system known as the papacy (See “Babylon, Not So Great Afterall” in the November issue of Bible Optics). The third angel uses the term “beast” to refer to the same corrupt system. We know this because the sea beast described in Revelation 13 fits the same description as the beast of Revelation 17. Both beasts have seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 13:1; 17:3). The difference is that chapter 17 pictures the combined powers of church and state more distinctly. The harlot Babylon is pictured riding the beast (A beast represents a secular kingdom. See Daniel 7:17, 23; 8:20, 21). This alerts us to the fact that it is the apostate church that controls the secular government.

The papacy is pictured as having regained the power and influence that it had over the kings of the earth during the dark ages. Once more it will use this power to force the masses to worship according to its dictates.

What’s the Mark?

“...and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand,...” Revelation 14:9

So, what is this mark? We find a clue in the eighth chapter of Ezekiel. In a vision, Ezekiel is shown a series of abominations committed by the Israelites ending with the greatest one of all—worshiping the sun with their backs toward the temple (Ezekiel 8:16). Babylon is said to be “THE MOTHER OF . . . THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Revelation 17:5) and she has ordained as her holy day of worship Sunday—the day of the Sun. She openly claims it as the mark of her authority. Notice these statements from church leaders:

“Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change was her act . . . And the act is a MARK of her ecclesiastical power and authority in religious matters” (Letter from C.F. Thomas, Chancellor of Cardinal Gibbons on October 28, 1895).

“Sunday is our mark of authority . . . The church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact” (Catholic Record, Sept. 1, 1923).

The visible mark of the beast is the false sabbath—Sunday. It is Satan’s counterfeit of God’s seal, his attempt to usurp worship for himself. A time is coming when the papacy will again demand the worship of all the peoples of the world (Revelation 13:7). She will cause all to “receive a mark on their right hand” (to go along with her commands to avoid persecution) “or on their foreheads” (to truly believe in her lies; Revelation, 13:15–17).

God, by the third angel’s message, gives this solemn warning, “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” (Revelation 14:9, 10).

The Faithful Remnant

Cain was rebellious and “worshiped” God in his own way. Abel was obedient and exhibited true worship according to God’s commands. This will be the dividing line in the end. Everyone will be marked accordingly.

We each will receive either the mark of the beast or the seal of God (Revelation 7:3, 4). Neither of these marks will be visible, but they will each have a corresponding visible action. God will not allow the beast to force anyone to receive His mark. Neither will He force anyone to receive His seal. We must each decide for ourselves. Will we keep the commandments of God, including observance of His sign of authority, the seventh-day Sabbath, or will we bow to the beast and accept Satan’s mark? If Jesus has our hearts and we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14), the choice will be easy.

By: John Cloud



READY TO LEARN MORE? www.ThreeAngels.info

A brand new website from the General Conference with all the best materials available on the three angel’s messages. Videos, audios, articles and more!



Does God Need Anger Management?

Are we “sinners in the hands of an angry God”? This phrase, from the famous sermon of 18th century American Revivalist Jonathan Edwards, rings in the chambers of our 21st-century minds. For the secular mind, it’s difficult to even believe there is a God in this age of science and technology; believing in a kind and loving God, now that’s nonsense.

Critics argue that the God of the Old Testament is a short-tempered being who can barely tolerate the most minor infractions. Admittedly, a shallow reading of the Scriptures could give that impression. But is God really an angry, fickle deity who dangles us over the flames of hell? Or is His anger justified, even praiseworthy as some claim?

Slow to Anger

Consider the following, “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. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb’” (Revelation 14:9, 10). That sounds scary, doesn’t it? How would you like to drink “the wine of the wrath of God” (see this month’s Q&A section for more on this topic) and be tormented with “fire and brimstone”? Is that what God wants for us?

God described Himself to Moses as, “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). That doesn’t sound like a God who is anxious to inflict His wrath upon us. Rather, it depicts a God who is more inclined to compassion and graciousness. He is “slow to anger” but He does experience anger.

The Bible describes God’s anger in human terms. The Hebrew word for wrath or anger is (aph) which literally means “nose”. This is a Hebrew metaphor that points to the physical effects of anger. When a person is angry, their face and nose tend to heat up. Deuteronomy 29:27 could be translated as, “The Lord’s nose burned hot.” When we speak of God’s wrath we are speaking of real frustration and anger.

Some people don’t like the idea of a God that gets angry. To them, this doesn’t harmonize with the declaration that “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Could God’s Anger be Good?

When I see bad things happen to innocent people I get very angry. I was angry when I saw George Floyd’s neck being crushed by an officer’s knee. I was angry when I saw children forced to be soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was angry when I learned about the widespread system of sex trafficking in the U.S. Most anyone would agree that my anger was justified. What would it say about God if these injustices did not make Him angry as well?

It is the harm caused by humanity’s persistent sin that angers God. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah? The abuse and profligacy of those cities is a perfect example of what to expect when the sins of men go unchecked. The condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah was not instant. It took many generations for them to reach their degenerate condition. God had allowed time for repentance, but it never came. He could not permit injustice to continue perpetually.

Compelled by Love

Jonathan Edwards was wrong. We are not “sinners in the hands of an angry God.” No, we are sinners in the hands of a just and merciful God. His wrath serves as evidence of both His justice and mercy in dealing with sin. Because God is love, He cannot allow humanity to go on sinning indefinitely. The pain and suffering we bring upon ourselves is too much for Him—or us—to bear. Those who receive the mark of the beast will have chosen to align themselves with the beast’s toxic ways. Their thoughts and actions will be hurtful to themselves, others, and God. The Lord will prove both just and merciful in destroying them. In fact, His loving act of destroying the wicked is what will bring an end to sin once and for all.

by: Elijah Ramjattan

Bible Q&A

What is the “Wine of the Wrath of God”?

Everyone who receives the mark of the beast will “also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Revelation 14:10).

In the next chapter, John saw, “seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete” (Revelation 15:1). Whenever God’s wrath is mentioned in the book of Revelation, it is specifically pointing us to the seven last plagues and the ultimate destruction of the wicked in the lake of fire.

God’s anger is directed at the false religious system of Babylon, “to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath” (Revelation 16:19). It is said that “her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her” (Revelation 18:8).

The “wine of the wrath of God” is simply his wrath against sin as revealed in the seven last plagues and the lake of fire which will ultimately bring about the

destruction of the great whore of Babylon along with the Devil and his angels. It is only those who cling to sin and not to the Savior that will drink the wine and hear the message, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: (Matthew 25:41).

God has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). His wrath is not directed at humanity, but at sin and the agents of sin—Satan, demons, and Babylon.

The culmination of God’s wrath against sin is the lake of fire which results in eternal separation from God—the second death (Revelation 20:14; 21:8). When Jesus said in Gethsemane, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42), the cup he was referring to was the “wine of the wrath of God.” He drank it to the dregs at Calvary, becoming sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and experiencing the second death, so that we could be set free from the penalty and power of sin.



Do you have questions about the three angels’ messages?

Send them to us at godled@kytn.org.

Bible Q&A

Does God Intend to Torture People Forever?

A cursory reading of the third angel's message could give the impression that God plans to torture people for endless ages. This is what the majority of preachers have taught for centuries. But is this really what's being said?

Revelation 14:10, 11 says unrepentant sinners will be, "tormented with fire and brimstone . . . and the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night . . ."

Well, there we have it right? The eternal conscious torment of the wicked. But then again, maybe not. With a little investigation, it's easy to see that the Bible teaches otherwise.

First off, let's look at the word here translated as "forever." It is the Greek word "aion" from which we get our English word "eon". According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, "aion" can certainly mean "eternity" but it can also refer to a "period of time" or simply an "age." In our current text, it undoubtedly cannot mean "eternity." Otherwise, it would be contradicting various other passages of

Scripture that teach the permanent destruction of the wicked.

For example, "'You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,' says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:3). Also, speaking of Satan's destruction, God says, "I turned you to ashes upon the earth" (Ezekiel 28:18).

And we can't forget the most beloved verse of all, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Did you catch that? The Bible is clear. Unbelievers will "perish" and believers will have "everlasting life."

We don't know how long the wicked will suffer in the lake of fire. What we do know is that their suffering will come to an end. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is completely at odds with the Bible's truth that "God is love" (1 John 4:8).



Nelson Mercado
Pastor

Our goal is to help you grow in your understanding of key Bible teachings, gain a Biblical perspective on what is happening in our world today, and find tools to share your faith more effectively.

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