

Biblical Perspectives on the Mark of the Beast and the Seal of God and a Changing Dateline

How does dateline change in some Pacific islands affect the biblical teaching of the “seal of God” and the “mark of the beast?” Will the witness of the Church be weakened by the changes? Let us see what Scripture has to say.

The Seal of God is featured in Revelation chapter 7. Here is a description of when God holds back the full force of evil that is about to break out over the planet just before the end of time (v.1). An angel comes from God’s throne with “the seal of the living God” in his hand (v.2). He commands the angels who are holding back the storm of evil not to let go “till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads” (v. 3).

This parallels the description in Ezekiel chapter 9 where the pre-incarnate Christ directs operations (Ezek 8:2, cf Rev 1:13–5). He orders one of a group of “men” (angels) to write on the foreheads of people that “sigh and cry” for the “abominations done in the city (Ezek 9:2–4). The others are to follow, and destroy those who do not have that special protective mark (vv. 5, 6).

The similarities between the accounts in Rev. 7 and Ezek. 9 include the following: Great trouble is about to burst on the world (or on the city); there is a restraining power holding back overwhelming destruction, and some people are marked in their foreheads as protection from the destruction that immediately follows. Ezekiel does not indicate what the mark on the forehead is, but John does. Revelation chapter 7 speaks of 144,000 who are sealed, and chapter 14 expands it by describing the people who have been sealed standing on Mt Zion, and we are told what is written in their foreheads—the Father’s name (Rev 14:1).

So what is the Father’s name? God reveals His name a couple of times in Scripture: first at the burning bush where He calls Himself, “I Am” (Exod 3:13–14), then when God passes over the top of Mt Sinai while Moses hides in a split in the rock there. Then God “proclaims” His name (Exod 34:5) as a list of His characteristics: “merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and by no means clearing the guilty” (vv. 6, 7). When giving His name, God describes what He is like. The implication of this is that if God’s name is written in the foreheads of a large group of people, they will have characters similar to that of God.

In contrast to the *Seal of God*, the book of Revelation also mentions the *Mark of the Beast*. This is one of a number of such contrasts in the book: the harlot and the pure woman; The One who is and who was and who is to come (Jesus, Rev 1:8), and the beast who was mortally wounded but whose wound was healed (13:3); the everlasting gospel given by three angels, and the message of deception from the three frog-like spirits (16:13, 14); as well as the New Jerusalem and the city of Babylon. As you study one of the members of any of these contrasting pairs, a better understanding is gained of its opposite number.

So in our preliminary look at the *Seal of God* we already have some indication what the *mark of the beast* might be.

The *mark of the beast* is featured in Rev. 13. The chapter opens with a description of a “beast” rising out of the sea, followed by a beast coming out from the land. The second best is known for its deception and false worship, and in its zeal, it sets up of an image to honour the first beast (v.14). The second beast forces the issue by threatening people with death if they do not comply (v. 15). It is then that the second beast places a mark on the hands or foreheads of those who comply (v.16), enabling them to buy or sell, and preventing those without it to either buy or sell (v.17). That mark is also called “the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (v.17)—a direct parallel to the seal of God—God’s name written on the forehead. It is Satan himself who is behind these political-religious moves (v. 4). His name is expanded in the previous chapter: the great dragon, the serpent of old, the devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world (12:9).

So, what are the common threads between the seal and the mark? They are both given to protect the person who has it from death, they are both related to the name of the one being followed, and the one with the seal reflects the character of God, while the one with the mark reflects the character of Satan.

This then is the seal of God and the mark of the beast at the simplest level. To answer the questions first posed, does the change of dateline in some Pacific nations affect this teaching? Not at all. And, will the church’s witness be weakened by the changes? No. The main concern for us today is whose character we have, and who we are really following, God or the rebellious one? As we are confronted by those questions we must answer them honestly.