

## Christian Faith and Practice Through...The Mark

*Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." Revelation 14:9 NASB*

Okay, okay, some of you quit your screaming and stop heading for the hills. I figured the title of this article would get your attention, but I didn't think you'd freak out quite THAT much. I can just hear you now. "Bruce, HOW COULD YOU even ASSOCIATE THE MARK with Christian faith and practice?!?" Well, I'll tell you how I could. It's because God in His Word associates them.

Now hold on. I just got you calmed down and you're heading for the hills again. Relax for cryin' out loud, settle down and listen for a minute and I'll show you what I, and I think God, means. We'll start by going over the references in the Bible which talk about a, or the, mark. You may be surprised to learn that marking people (even on the forehead or hand) is mentioned in the Word a few centuries before the book of Revelation was even a twinkle in John's eye (Ezekiel 9:4-6). Oh, the wonders of searching His Word with a computer and a Bible search program!

Before that, though, we need to look at some words and make sure of the word meanings, so that when we read the verses we understand the idea the writer of the Scripture was trying to convey to us. For instance, what do you think of when you read the word 'mark?' A lot of times it's not just a smudge on a piece of paper, is it? That can be one of the meanings of 'mark,' but the normal use of the word is more along the lines of 'identification.' When someone (or something) is 'marked,' he or she is somehow identified and separated from those who are not marked. The 'mark' can be visible or invisible to others. Sometimes the ID can be positive, and sometimes negative, but the 'marking' is not really neutral.

**A 'mark' by any other name.** A quick word study in the Hebrew and Greek shows us a number of words that are translated into English as 'mark,' or the related words 'sign,' 'seal,' and 'signature.' In Hebrew, '*gebul*' (gay-bool, Strong's 1366) is a boundary marker as in Deuteronomy 19:4. A 'sign' or 'banner' is the meaning of '*oth*' (awth, 226) used of Cain's sign in Genesis 4:15, the sign of God's 'bow' in Genesis 9:13, and of Passover and eating unleavened bread in Exodus 13:9. '*Nega*' (nay-gah, Strongs 5061 strike, plague or leprosy) is the mark of leprosy and is used in various places throughout the Word such as Leviticus chapters 12 through 15. '*Shamar*' (pronounced like it looks, 8104), means to keep watch or guard as in Psalm 37:37. In places like Job 36:32 the

word *'paga'* (pah-gah, 6293) is used but the word itself has a range of meanings from 'meet' to 'intercede' or 'supplication,' and even 'to kill.' Ezekiel 21:20 and 44:5 use the word *'sum'* or *'sim'* (soom or seem, 7760) for mark, and the range of meanings can go from 'put' or 'place' to 'assign,' 'charge,' 'consider,' and even 'establish.' *'Nes'* (nays, 5251) is signal or sign, banner, standard or ensign (Ezekiel 27:7); *'chaqaq'* (ha-kawk, h is a guttural, 2710) means to cut in, inscribe, decree, or carve (Proverbs 8:29); and *'takan'* (tah-kawn, 8505) is not only rendered as 'mark' but also 'regulate,' 'weigh,' 'measure,' 'estimate,' and 'firmly set.' *'Tav'* (tahv, 8420a) is probably one of the more common words and is used in places such as Ezekiel 9:4-6 and can mean mark or signature. We will be returning to a discussion of this reference in just a minute. We should also include *'chotham'* (hoe-thahm, 2368) meaning a 'seal' (Genesis 38:18) and its' root *'chatham'* (hah-thahm, 2856) meaning 'to seal' (Job 37:7).

*Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.* Isaiah 8:16 NASB

The Greek words are not so numerous. *'Semeion'* (sa-may-ee-on, 4592) can mean 'mark' and it is also rendered a 'sign' or means a distinguishing mark. Paul uses this word in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 to point out that his signature is a particular way of identifying his letters. This word also translates (in the Septuagint) the Hebrew word *'tav'* in the Ezekiel 9:4-6 passage we will be discussing soon, and is also used to translate *'oth'* (sign or banner) in Exodus 13:9. *'Prographo'* (pro-graph-oh, 4270) means to 'write before' or 'written in earlier times' and is used in Jude 4 to tell us about people who were marked out beforehand in times past for a particular condemnation. Another couple of related words are *sphragis* (sfraw-geese, 4973 'seal'), used of the seals on the scroll in Revelation 6, and *sphragizo* (sfraw-gee-zoh, 4972 'to seal') describing the sealing of the 144,000. Finally (but not final), the word *'charagma'* (ka-rahg-mah, 5480) is used seven times in the book of Revelation and has a range of meaning including 'carve,' 'impress,' 'sharpen,' 'engrave,' and 'stamp.'

**Why mark?** The whole idea of a mark is to make some sort of statement about what is marked. Part of the time the statement could reflect ownership. Another part of the time it could be an advertisement. Other times the statement we are trying to make with our mark could be to 'set apart' an item or a person from a group of similar items or people in order to give it (or them) special treatment. When a soldier 'marks' a target (like 'painting' it with a laser) that means he has separated it from the surrounding area in order to give it special treatment (uh-oh). A teacher might 'mark' a student as being a disruption to the class, and take steps to keep him (or her) from getting out of hand. In either of these cases no actual 'mark' is made on the individual, but there is a marking nonetheless.

An object is usually marked because it doesn't exhibit any characteristics of its' own that would help with identification. For instance the boundary marker mentioned above is just a rock, all by itself. But plunk it down in a particular spot and place a special mark

on it, and the simple rock becomes a sign showing where one property stops and another starts. Which is very important if you want to know where to stop pulling weeds!

A person who is marked, on the other hand (in the Word), seems to exhibit behavior that leads to the marking. They are marked by their behavior long before any external mark is made. Cain is one example (Genesis 4:15). Another example is in the Ezekiel passage I have been promising to address.

*The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary." So they started with the elders who were before the temple. (Ezekiel 9:4-6 NASB)*

This is a very important point to note about marks on people (again, in the Word). They are made after the fact. A person is marked after he or she exhibits behavior consistent with the (eventual) marking. We might even say, as some people do about baptism, that a physical mark is an outward sign of an inward condition. People are 'marked' by their actions, apart from any kind of a name tag, whether hung on the shirt or stamped on the skin. According to this passage, first there were people 'sighing and groaning' over all the evil being committed in Jerusalem, and only later were they marked.

**Indelible marking.** There is an element of permanence in biblical marking. In the case of people, it is sort of like God is putting a stamp on a person's behavior to 'lock' it in, or to say, 'so be it.' For the believer or child of God, at some point in our lives God stamps His mark on us and also says, 'So be it.' For the person who takes the 'mark of the beast' described in the book of Revelation God also says, 'so be it.' In this vein the psalmist expresses relief that God does not 'mark' iniquities (meaning to make a judgment without space for repentance), which should be a great relief to all those who want to take advantage of it.

*Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. Psalm 130:1-4 NASB*

**The mark of pickiness in wording.** You may have noticed by now that I am not making a big deal out of the different words for 'mark' in the Bible. It is my opinion that while there may be different kinds of marks represented by different words, the basic meanings are nearly the same. It doesn't appear to me that there is a great deal of difference

between ‘carving’ a mark or ‘writing’ a mark, between a ‘banner’ or a ‘sign,’ between ‘seal’ and ‘impress,’ or whether a mark is invisible or visible. For those with wisdom to see, imparted by the Word, a mark by any other name is still obvious, especially when it comes to people.

**The mark of God.** God has been marking people for a long time, through following His Word (laws, statutes, commands, whatever you want to call them).

*“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.”* Deuteronomy 6:4-8 NASB, see also Deuteronomy 11:18

*“I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”* Ezekiel 20:11-12 NASB, see also 20:19,20

*“And it (Passover) shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.”* Exodus 13:9, 16 NASB, ( ) added.

When a person chooses to follow God’s Word, he or she is marked by the decision, which is proved or shown by actions that are in keeping with that decision. Just like in Ezekiel 9 where people were marked after they ‘sighed and groaned’ over the iniquities that were committed, God’s people everywhere are marked when doing what He says. By pursuing, hungering or thirsting after righteousness we are ‘sealed,’ ‘impressed,’ ‘signed,’ ‘stamped,’ ‘inscribed’ and ‘carved.’ We are ‘assigned’ a place with the righteous, and He ‘establishes’ us on the Rock of our Salvation, the Messiah Yeshua. He is our ‘banner’ and we are His. His signature is on us, and we couldn’t be any more His if we were branded like cattle. We ‘keep watch on’ or ‘guard’ His commandments because they are our very life. As surely as if we had a mark on the forehead or hand, our actions and reactions mark us as belonging to Him.

**The mark of the beast.** Now we come to the ‘mark of the beast.’ This mark is mentioned six times in the book of Revelation (plus once in a negative sense in 20:4). The first time is not until chapter 13, after a series of judgments is handed out. Notice, however, that repentance (or lack of it) is mentioned a total of ten times, eight of those before the mark is given (leaving aside the question of whether the book is chronological or not). What’s really sad is that five of those eight mentions of repentance are directed

at the Church. But I think it's significant that first we are told people 'would not repent,' and later these same people are given the mark of the beast. To my way of thinking, although I have been known to be wrong, the mark is simply a 'stamp' of approval from the beast for the anti-God behavior that has already been exhibited. It is also received voluntarily, albeit because of deception according to 19:20. However, the mark is also connected to 'worship' of the beast (14:9, 14:11, 16:2, 19:20 and 20:4), which suggests to me that there is an 'eyes open' exchange – perhaps monetary gain (buying and selling, 13:17) for worship. I do not think this mark is given (or taken) accidentally. I also do not think it is a computer chip, a bar code, or other mundane signature. It seems to be something very specific, received knowingly, and an 'outward sign of an inward condition.' These people already follow the beast (in fact are following the spirit of anti-Christ even now), and the mark is just a testament to a pre-existing fact. Carving a mark in their forehead or hand is just bringing it out in the open, so to speak.

**Distractions.** I think also that the people who are trying to identify the exact nature of the mark are throwing out, in essence, 'red herrings.' Some are so busy trying to spook people with tales of evil computer chips (in order to sell books) they forget that the focus is God, not the beast or the false prophet. It's a lot like the near hysteria that surrounded the Y2K changeover. Remember how many were convinced that Y2K was going to be the end of the world, only to have the actual event fizzle like so many fireworks? But the real problem is that after one too many people cry 'wolf,' the rest of us have a tendency to let down on our watchfulness. Too many of us are focusing on the mark of the beast and not enough on the mark of God (following His commandments).

The Satan counterfeits the things of God as much as he needs to in order to keep his kingdom going. It follows that if people can be 'marked' by submitting to God, they can also be 'marked' by submitting to the beast. Even if there is an external mark (which seems likely given the meaning of *charagma* (to carve or impress)), it is most probably given after a person has made a decision to worship and follow the beast. Obviously this word (*charagma*) is more emphatic than merely 'to mark,' but equally obvious is that the word describes something more than a computer chip imbedded under the skin. It also tells us that the 'mark' is not something that one receives because they were walking down the sidewalk and accidentally fell down (or got a vaccination, or whatever), but is something deliberately taken.

Let us consider how we are marked, and take care that the marking is according to His Word, not according to the 'instead of' (the meaning of 'anti') Christ. The deceiver is crafty, and will soon put forth all his power to entice the unwary into permanent disobedience. May our Father include you as one of His own 'marked ones.'

Shalom  
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