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## IS SUNDAY THE MARK OF THE BEAST?

For many, many years, Seventh-day Adventists have linked Sunday worship with the “mark of the beast.” They believe that prior to the return of Christ, the final “test” as to who will be saved or lost, will hinge on whether one worships on Saturday or Sunday.

Multiplied thousands of dollars are being spent on large billboards warning about the National Sunday Law they believe is coming “soon.” These billboards, with wording similar to that shown in the accompanying illustration, also include a phone number to obtain a free booklet. Within recent months, we have seen two of these signs in our area, one on a busy highway about a mile away, and another on the I-10 freeway.

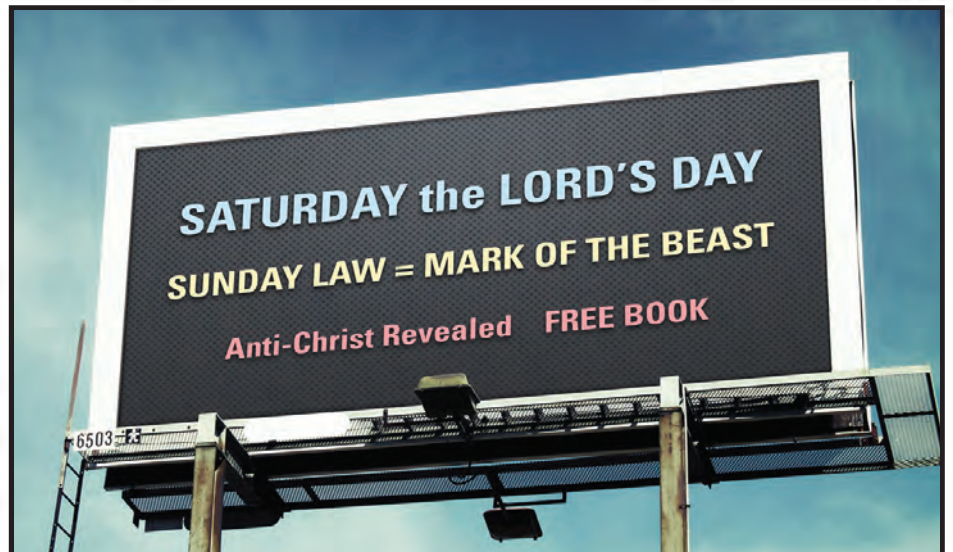
Also nearby, on the front of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church building, there has long been an image of three angels, beneath which is a scripture reference: Revelation 14:6-12. This passage, commonly referred to as “The Third Angel’s Message,” warns about the mark of the beast. In Adventist belief, this will be a law forcing everyone in the world to worship on *Sunday*. Those who refuse will be killed!

It is further taught that one prominent nation will enforce this Sunday law, so that both small and great, rich and poor, will receive the mark of the beast. That nation will not be China, Russia, or Germany. It will be *the United States of America!*

As bizarre as all this sounds—I am not making it up! It has all been spelled out in books like *National Sunday Law* (millions of copies have been distributed) and goes back to Ellen G. White, herself, in *The Great Controversy*, a standard doctrinal work among Adventists.

At the outset, let it be clear: I am not hostile toward Christians who happen to attend a Seventh-day Adventist Church. I consider them to be sincere and honorable people, worthy of respect. But I believe their “mark of the beast” teaching is seriously flawed!

The verses about the “mark of the beast” are found in the book of Revelation (13:16, 17; 14:9, 11; 19:20). Those who serve the “beast” are pictured as having his mark



or name “in their right hand or in their foreheads.”

In somewhat the same way that cattle are branded, in ancient times it was a custom for slaves to receive the mark or name of their master, usually impressed on the right hand or forehead. This showed *to whom* they belonged. This actual custom provided the basis for the *symbolism* used in Revelation.

Also in Revelation, it should be noticed, those who serve the “Lamb,” are pictured as having the *name* of God “written in their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1; 22:3, 4). They belong *to him*. They have the “*seal* of God in their foreheads” (Rev. 7:2,3; 9:4).

The meaning of what is being symbolized is quite clear: those who are slaves of the beast have his mark or name in their foreheads; those who serve God have his name or seal in theirs. The symbolism shows *to whom* each group belongs.

This raises the question about whether this symbolism requires an *added* meaning. Adventists point out, *correctly*, that the mark is not to be understood as a *literal* mark in the forehead. And, they reject, *correctly*, the speculation of those who suppose the mark has to do with zip codes, bar codes, Social Security numbers, computer chips, etc.

But the long-held meaning Adventists place on the mark of the beast is that it refers to Sunday worship, and that the seal or mark on those who follow the Lamb, in contrast, is observing the seventh day as God’s Sabbath.

Often when there are doctrinal differences between Christian groups, each side has “some” argument as to why they believe as they do. Otherwise few, if any, would pay much attention.

The Adventist teaching starts in Daniel. Four beasts are described which are commonly understood to symbolize the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Among the horns on the fourth beast, the Roman beast, Daniel noticed a “little horn” rise up. With eyes like a man, and a mouth speaking great things, he would wear out the saints of the most High, “and *think to change times and laws*” (Dan. 7:8, 25).

According to Adventist teaching, this refers to the Pope (Papacy); that he supposed he could change the Law of God, changing the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday!

This “little horn” would wear out the saints of the most High “for a time and times and half a time” (Dan. 7:25), that is, three-and-a-half years. Other verses use the equivalent term 42 months or 1,260 days.

Turning to the book of Revelation—which often uses imagery based on Old Testament passages—John saw a beast rising out of the sea. It was also said of him that he would speak blasphemies, make war with the saints, and “continue forty-two months”—the same time frame as mentioned in Daniel (Rev. 13:1-7).

“If you compare this description of the ‘little horn’ with the description of the ‘beast’ in Revelation 13,” says the book *National Sunday Law* (p. 19), “you’ll see that they are *one and the same power*.”

So, according to Adventist teaching, what was called a “little horn” on the fourth beast in Daniel, becomes the beast, himself, in Revelation 13. If so, a *Roman* connection is established and thus a link with the Pope (Papacy) and the Roman Catholic Church.

As to the time period the beast (Papacy) would “make war with the saints”—1,260

days—Adventists figure these days as *years* with precise dates. According to the book *National Sunday Law* (p. 23, 24):

“From 538 A.D. the Papacy ruled for exactly 1260 years, until 1798 when something incredible happened. The Pope was taken prisoner! Napoleon’s general, Berthier, captured the Pope and took him to France. A deadly wound. The Papacy had reigned exactly 1260 years.”

Adventists believe this fulfilled Revelation 13:3: “And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death,” and that “his deadly wound was healed” in 1929:

“In 1929, the Italian government recognized Vatican City as an independent state. Once again, the Pope was king.”

Continuing in Revelation 13, John sees another beast, this one rising up out of the earth with “two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon” (Rev. 13:11-18). This second beast (who will cause all the people of the world to take the mark of the first beast) is—according to Adventist teaching—the *United States of America!*

According to *National Sunday Law* (p. 8): “When a beast arises from the ‘sea,’ it always represents a power rising in a highly populated area; amid ‘peoples, multitudes, and nations, and tongues.’ Revelation 17:15.” This is taken to mean the Papacy rose to power in Europe, a highly *populated* area. But, then, because the second beast rises from the “earth,” an attempt is made to give this an opposite meaning: a largely *unpopulated* area, a new land.

Mrs. White explained it this way: “One nation, and *only one*, meets the specifications of this prophecy; it points unmistakably to the *United States of America.*” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 502).

We will now go back through these various points and take a closer look. As to the claim that the “little horn” in Daniel 7:25 refers to the Pope changing the Sabbath from the seventh day to Sunday, a better case for that view could be made if this verse had used the word *law* (as in God’s Law, not *laws*) and if the word *day* (not *times*) had been used. Actually this wording about “times and laws” is somewhat general.

Earlier in Daniel, similar wording is ascribed to God: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and *he changes the times and the seasons*” (Dan. 2:20, 21). For the “little horn” to think he could change times and laws shows the arrogance of his claims, but nothing is actually said about the Sabbath or Sunday.

We notice the word “change” again in a New Testament context, Hebrews 7:12: “For the priesthood being *changed*, there is made of necessity a *change* also of the law.” It should be noted that the word “change” does not, in itself, have a sinister, negative meaning.

Even Seventh-Day Adventists allow for some *changes*. The Bible says, “You shall keep the Sabbath...Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, *he shall surely be put to death*” (Exodus 31:12-17). They believe this has been “changed” and do not promote legislation to kill Sabbath breakers!

Adventists believe the 1,260 *days* the little horn or beast would “make war against the saints,” should be figured as *years*. Their claim—that these years lasted from 538 A.D. to 1798—is loaded with problems.

Pointing out that 42 months is the same as 1,260 days, *National Sunday Law* (p. 75) says: “A month in Bible reckoning contains 30 days. A year contains 360 days.” But the years from 538 to 1798 A.D. were years of 365 days! This would be a difference of 6,300 days, throwing the whole count into discord.

It is claimed that the Papacy was “officially established” in the year 538 A.D. What does this mean? Was there some amazing event whereby the Pope’s authority was established in this specific year? Or was this simply a case of counting back 1,260 years from 1798 to make things fit?

As to the “war against the saints” lasting “exactly” 1,260 years (as claimed), where is the historical evidence the Pope (Papacy) did this from 538 to 1798 A.D.? We know, of course, there was a horrible Inquisition, those who protested against the Catholic Church were persecuted and sometimes killed—we know all of this—but where is the evidence this started in the year 538? Or ended in 1798?

Suppose someone gave the dates for World War II as (let’s say) 1826 to 2002. Ridiculous, of course. Why, then, try to justify arbitrary dates that are simply cited to support a belief?

The Reformers, in the heat of the battle, pointed out the crimes of the Papacy. In various ways they linked the Pope with the Antichrist or man of sin. But this is a long way from supposing the mark of the beast involves Sunday worship!

Adventists teach that the “sea” from which the first beast rose represents peoples, nations, and tongues (Europe), and so, consequently, the “earth” from which

the second beast rises, refers to a relatively unpopulated land (America). In all due respect, this is not a strong argument.

Even if we grant that the “waters” in Revelation 17:15 are peoples, nations, and tongues, in Revelation 13:1, the beast rises “out of the *sea.*” And taking a closer look, we read that John witnessed this while standing on the “*sand* of the sea.” He was on an island, the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea (Rev. 1:9). It seems more likely *this* is the sea that provided the setting. It should be noticed, also, that the beasts in Daniel came up from “the Great Sea” (Daniel 7:2, 3) which, in all probability, referred to the Mediterranean Sea (cf. Josh. 15:12; 23:4; Ezek. 47:10, 19).

Equally weak is the idea that the two-horned beast of Revelation refers to America because America has a *two* party system of government, or that there is some link with the two-horned buffalo (bison), estimated at 60 million that once roamed the land that would become the United States.

While some might not be as strict as others on this point, Adventists have long been taught that to *fully* obey the fourth commandment, one must not only rest on the Sabbath, but *work on Sunday.* J. N. Andrews, writing in the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* (November 7, 1854) said one must “labor six days,” which includes Sunday, and that this is “the *only* precept for Sunday-keeping in the Bible”!

In the *Review and Herald* (July 13, 1897), Ellen G. White said: “When you obey the decree that commands you to cease from labor on Sunday and worship God...you consent to receive the mark of the beast.”

Because of the Adventist belief that Sunday must be a *work* day—not a *worship* day—back over the years they have opposed any legislation about Sunday being a day of rest, stores being closed, etc.

Years ago, a dear man I knew fairly well was called to serve as the pastor of a Seventh-day church (not Adventist) in another state. The church had long met once a week—on the Sabbath—but he wanted to add a mid-week service. He faced opposition on this. He told me that one woman insisted that worship was to be *only* on the Sabbath. The other days of the week were to be common work days. If he started having a service on Wednesday, what would be next? A *Sunday* service?

Adventist literature has long argued against worship on the first day, describing it in the most negative ways. In 1850 the

*Advent Review Extra*, pp. 10,11) included this statement: "Sunday-keeping is...the mark of the beast....Those who worship the beast and his image by observing the first day are certainly idolaters, as were the worshippers of the golden calf."

An early Adventist preacher, Uriah Smith, proclaimed: "The reception of his mark [Sunday worship] must be something that involves the greatest offense that can be committed against God." (*The Marvel of Nations*, pp 170, 183).

According to *National Sunday Law* (p. 36): "Satan hates the fourth commandment more than all others."

A pastor I have known for many years—whose church meets on Sunday (and other days)—told me about a couple in his church who believe they should observe the seventh day. They do this by "resting" on Saturday, but come to his church on Sunday. He welcomes them and respects their conviction (Rom. 14:5, 6).

Years ago, while visiting with a seventh-day pastor, he told me he was raised with the seventh day belief and still believed that way. "But," he said, "there are Sunday churches in my community that are more spiritually fruitful than my own church!" Quite often he would attend their services.

If Sunday worship is so evil it will provide the final test about right and wrong, one wonders if some could (potentially) have the "seal" of God and the "mark" of the beast at the same time?

Apparently God does not consider the first day of the week as evil. When the Holy Spirit was outpoured on the day of Pentecost, it was the first day of the week—not the Sabbath, but the day after the Sabbath (Lev. 23:15,16; Acts 2:1). So powerful was that outpouring 3,000 people received Jesus Christ and were baptized.

Many of us received Christ on a Sunday, as did many who later joined the Adventist Church. Of course the gospel message is valid any day of the week.

Something I have observed over the years: When people hold a doctrine that differs from others, they commonly feel a special obligation to defend it. In so doing, they may formulate arguments that are extreme or misapply scripture. It seems to us this has been the case with our present subject.

Many churches display slogans like: "Christ is the Answer," "Jesus is Lord," "God Loves You," or the Bible reference "John 3:16." Adventists would have no objection

to any of these. But it is The Third Angel's Message they consider to be of utmost importance—"Revelation 14:6-12"—a warning, they believe, against worshipping on Sunday!

In *The Great Controversy*, Mrs. White certainly upheld Reformers for their efforts—Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Tyndale, Wesley. They worshipped on Sunday—as did William Miller, from whom the Adventists trace their beginnings as a movement. None taught that Sunday was the mark of the beast.

According to Adventist belief, God honored the Reformers for the stand they took, sharing the light they had in dark times. But in time, the light of God's word would reveal more: the stark contrast between the Sabbath (God's seal) and Sunday (the mark of the beast).

The book *National Sunday Law* (p. 57) describes it this way: "Issues about God's true Sabbath will spread around the world. The truth of God's fourth commandment will be seen in contrast with the counterfeit day which the image of the beast is trying to enforce by law...all will be led to receive either the 'seal of God' or the 'mark of the beast'."

When there is so much obvious and unmistakable evil in the world, it hardly seems that a disputed doctrinal issue about Saturday or Sunday would be the final "test" regarding right and wrong.

The Scriptures clearly state that salvation is in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 16:31). If there is to be a final "test," wouldn't it center on people knowing him—not on which day they worship him? Or, if a beastly, evil, secular government were to take over the world, it seems more likely the issue would be whether Christ should be worshipped at all.

Nevertheless, over and over Adventists have made statements like: "When the test comes, it will be clearly shown what the mark of the beast is. It is the keeping of Sunday." (Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 980.)

If the time finally comes when the United States of America passes a Sunday law forcing people to worship only on Sunday, as claimed, we will all take notice. If that happens, Adventist credibility will be restored!

As we have seen, in the symbolism of Revelation, those who serve the beast have his mark in their foreheads. Those who follow the Lamb are also marked or "sealed" in

their foreheads (Rev. 7:2, 3; 9:4). The imagery is probably based on Ezekiel 9:4.

As early as 1847, early Adventist leader Joseph Bates proposed that Sabbath-keeping was the Seal of God. This teaching was later adopted by Ellen G. White who repeatedly taught: "The Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the seal of the living God" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 722).

Adventists point out that the words "seal" and "sign" can be used interchangeably (Rom. 4:11). Then, it is further pointed out, that God said, "I gave them [Israelites] my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them" (Ezek. 20:12, 20). So, they believe, the Sabbath is God's sign, or seal, his mark upon those who follow the Lamb. It follows, then, that the counterpart—the mark of the beast—must mean worshipping on Sunday instead of the Sabbath!

Indeed the Sabbath was given as a sign to Israel, but the Bible mentions numerous other signs that were given (Exod. 8:23, 12:13, 13:9; Num. 16:38, 26:10; Josh. 4:6; 1 Kings 13:3,5; 2 Kings 20:9; Isa. 7:11,14; Ezek. 4:3; Luke 2:34; Rom. 4:11, etc.).

The author of *National Sunday Law* (pp. 45,46), claiming that God's "seal" is the Sabbath, cites Exodus 20:8-11. He then adds: "This is the only place in the Bible where you will find God's seal." But what about the following verses?

"You were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise...the earnest of our inheritance ....Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed" (Eph. 1:13, 14; 4:30); and, "God has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21, 22). It would be difficult to insert the word "Sabbath" in these verses.

Many early Adventists had come from Sunday backgrounds. Having come to believe that the seventh day Sabbath was God's "seal," they were hopeful that getting others to reject Sunday worship and "accept the Sabbath" would have a sanctifying effect. This did not, in itself, prove to be the case. This should come as no surprise. The Jews at the time of Christ were strict Sabbath keepers (Matt. 12:2; Mk. 3:2; Lk. 13:15,16; John 5:10, 16, 18)—yet they were the very ones who killed him! (1 Thess. 2:15).

The Constitution of the United States, First Amendment, says:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

In her book *The Great Controversy* (p. 505), Ellen G. White actually quotes these words and says they will be set aside so the American government can make a law forcing Sunday worship!

The writer of *National Sunday Law* (pp. 55,56) says: "In order to pass a national Sunday law, the Constitution must first be effected....According to Bible prophecy, it will be repudiated."

One wonders how it is that over the centuries millions of dedicated, sincere people have studied Bible prophecy, yet failed to find this!

Unlike some events that happen *quickly*, changing the American Constitution could take considerable time. Yet, according to the Adventist position, the national Sunday law of the United States will spread to all the nations of the world. How long would that take?

"And *all* that dwell upon the earth shall worship [the beast], whose names are not written in the book of life" (Rev. 13:8). Worshipping the beast, according to Adventist belief, involves taking his mark: Sunday worship.

It is estimated that there are 500 million atheists in the world. Because their names are "not written in the Lamb's book of life," they must be included in the "all" who will worship the beast and take his mark. How long might it take to force all of *these* to worship on Sunday?

About 1.8 billion people in the world are Muslim—about 24 percent of the world's population. Their holy day is Friday. How long will it take to force all of these to become Sunday keepers?

Adventists have warned for over 150 years that this Sunday law is coming, often accompanied with wording that it is "coming with swift surety," "in the near future," "soon." Despite the inconsistency, it continues to be promoted on television programs, radio, magazines, books, and billboards. One wonders how many more Prophecy Seminars need to be conducted, how many more copies of *National Sunday Law* will need to be distributed, so that everyone in the world will be warned not to worship on Sunday.

If we substitute SUNDAY WORSHIP in the verses that mention the mark of the beast—and THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA in verses about the beast that will cause the mark to be taken—it should be obvious that the Adventist teaching is seriously flawed:

#### **Revelation 13:15-17:**

And THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA...will cause as many as will not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA will cause all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to WORSHIP ON SUNDAY and no man will be able to buy or sell, unless he WORSHIPS ON SUNDAY.

#### **Revelation 14:9-11:**

If any man....WORSHIPS ON SUNDAY ...the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God...he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...whosoever WORSHIPS ON SUNDAY.

#### **Revelation 15:2:**

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over WORSHIPPING ON SUNDAY.

#### **Revelation 19:2:**

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that WORSHIPPED ON SUNDAY...These both were cast alive into a lake of fire.

#### **Revelation 20:4:**

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them which had *not* WORSHIPPED ON SUNDAY; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

I think we can now understand why, years ago, D. M. Canright (a former Adventist minister) wrote: "Of all the wild Adventist speculations in the prophecies, *this deserves to stand among the wildest!*"

It is understandable that a person who has developed friendships and has fellowship within a certain group—whether Seventh-day Adventist or some other—doesn't want to make waves. He wants to be loyal, a team player. So it becomes easy to go along with a teaching, even when it is not very solid.

Years ago I heard George Vandeman, a well-known Adventist minister, say he had no idea what meat tasted like—that no pork, beef, fish, or fowl had ever entered his mouth. As with other denominations, some Adventists are more dedicated to their beliefs than others. My hunch is that not all Adventists actually believe America is about to force all the people in the world to worship on Sunday or to kill those who do not.

In this article (largely condensed because of space), I have endeavored to speak strongly enough to make the point. But—

please understand—I am not hostile toward Christians who happen to attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Over the years I have had occasion to visit services at a variety of churches in our area, including the local Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Back in the 1970s, while living in a different part of California, I had a dentist who was a Seventh-day Adventist. Being a neighbor, one day as I happened to walk by his house, I noticed he was working on a canoe he was building in his garage. He had just drilled some holes and I mentioned (jokingly) that it looked like he knew how to use a drill! One time in his dental chair—with cotton in my mouth, and other restrictions, making it almost impossible to talk—he asked me how I believed about the book of Revelation!

I have had some friendly discussions with a former Mayor of Palm Springs, Ron Oden, who was, at an earlier period in his life, an Adventist pastor. On one occasion I spoke with Dr. Raul Ruiz, the congressman from our area, whose church affiliation is listed as Seventh-day Adventist.

Years ago I met two well-known Adventist ministers, H.M.S. Richards (Voice of Prophecy) and Pastor J. L. Tucker (The Quiet Hour). I had correspondence with noted Adventist writers and ministers, Le Roy Froom, Samuele Bacchiocchi, and Doug Batchelor. On a side note, in his testimony, Doug Batchelor tells about a time in his youth—before coming to Christ—when a remote cave high in the mountains above *Palm Springs* became his home!

I am not on a mission to put down Seventh-day Adventists. Like other groups, they are not wrong on "everything"—*of course*. But I guess we will have to agree—agree to *disagree*—about Sunday worship being the mark of the beast! —RW

**Additional copies of this article  
will be sent free upon request.**

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