

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 77

The Mark Of The Beast

The Kingdom Series Part 16

by Alex Robertson

Before the kingdom of Christ comes, the kingdom of antichrist, the counterfeit in all its fulness. We read about it in the book of Revelation chapter 13. In this final part of the Kingdom Series we are considering a subject mentioned in that chapter on which there has been much debate: the 'mark of the beast'. I want to suggest that all of the speculation about what exactly this 'mark' will be – which amounts to paranoia in some Christian circles – is in itself a red herring, a smokescreen obscuring the real issue.

Down the centuries there have been endless suggestions about the numerological significance of world leaders' names, from Nero to Napoleon, all attempting to add "the number of their names" to 666. A couple of decades ago the 'big thing' was the number 666 in barcodes, now the attention has shifted to ID computer chip implants. The perceived need for more security, particularly in the USA since September 11th 2001, has pushed the science of ID implants into fast forward, so that what was once science fiction is quickly becoming science fact. Companies are now marketing technology that would enable a tiny chip, about the size of a grain of rice, to be implanted under the skin. One company producing such technology in the USA has actually consulted theologians, conscious of the fears of Christians, and tried to put their minds to rest by assuring them that such a chip could not be 'the mark' because it is under the skin and hidden from view, whereas 'the mark' mentioned in Revelation is 'on' the hand, not 'in' it.

Well, go that far and you get into different translations: the Authorized Version actually does say 'in' rather than 'on'. But is this the real issue? Should we be so obsessed about the outward mark, or should we rather be considering what's behind it – the meaning and significance of the mark? God is not interested in the legalistic avoidance of an outward thing, he is interested in the allegiance of our hearts.

If we look at the scriptures which mention the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:11-18, also 14:9,11, 16:2, 19:20) what is noticeable is how much worship is mentioned. The whole thing here is not just about taking a mark, it's about worship of the beast (antichrist) and his image. Worship is to do with submission, allegiance, acceptance and conformity – whatever you are worshipping, whether God, Satan or Satan's system, the world. Allegiance and submission and conformity are in the heart. If we want to get to the roots of what this mark is about, what we have to ask is this: how deeply are we involved in the systems of this world – antichrist's system? How conformed are we to this world? Is our allegiance to God or to this world?

Another important point is that Satan is a counterfeiter. He is never original, he always copies things that God has done. If there is a mark of the antichrist, we can immediately suspect that Satan is

copying a mark of God or of Christ. Is there such a thing as the mark of God? Certainly. God has been marking people ever since he put a mark on Cain, to seal them, to separate them for him or protect them from wrath. God told the Israelites that when they put the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts, that would be “a token” (the Hebrew word means a sign or distinguishing mark) to protect their firstborn from destruction. God also talks about a mark on the forehead. Ezekiel 9:4 mentions an angel setting “a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for the abominations” done in Jerusalem. Again, this mark was to protect them; all those who did not have the mark were destroyed. In Revelation 9:4 the angels are told to hurt “only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads” – those who had previously been sealed or marked by God (Revelation 7:1-4). The fact that God marks people to protect or separate them makes Satan angry, as he cannot touch those who God has separated or protected, so he is all the more desperate to have his own ‘mark’ to separate people to himself.

Satan’s Mark

Satan’s mark is on the hand or the forehead; even in these details he is not original. In Exodus God tells his people about a distinguishing mark on the forehead or the hand: “It shall be a sign unto you upon your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes” (Exodus 13:9, see also Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18). In this case the ‘sign’ God was talking about was Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, and the feast of unleavened bread. It was to be a memorial of the way God had separated them from the world; the unleavened bread signified lack of corruption and mixture in their lives. The Jews interpreted this ‘sign’ literally, and it developed into the phylactery – a word which means a safeguard or amulet. According to Strong’s Concordance, the phylactery consisted of strips of parchment with the above scriptures from Exodus and Deuteronomy written on them, enclosed in a small leather case, which the Jews bound with straps around their foreheads and arms when they prayed. The scrolls ‘were thought to have the power to avert various evils and drive away demons’.

Clearly something had gone wrong here. The command of God in Exodus was turned into something more like an occult charm. Jesus certainly rebuked the Pharisees for “making broad their phylacteries” (Matthew 23:5). But notice why Jesus found fault with them: because they were obsessed with the outward, but ignored the inward. They paid scrupulous attention to the outward regulations and customs but ignored the inward realities that those customs were supposed to signify. Before we condemn them, let’s consider: are we not just as guilty, if we concern ourselves with wondering about the outward physical appearance of the mark of the beast, but ignore the inward spiritual reality of what the mark means?

We need to focus off the outward. Yes, we know there will be a man who is the final antichrist, there will be a final false prophet, an image, a demand to worship, a physical mark. But ! As John tells us in his first letter, we have been in the last days for 2000 years, and there have been “many antichrists” around since those days. The spirit of antichrist is always manifest in the world. Do we see it? Do we discern it now? If the mark of the beast, the mark of antichrist, means conformity to this world, the antichristian system, then the strongest safeguard against it is Paul’s advice: “Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). John gives similar advice when talking about the spirit of antichrist in his first letter: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15).

Bearing The Marks

The safeguard against taking the mark of the beast is to take the mark of God. Paul said “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17). He was talking about physical marks, the marks of persecution and suffering for the name of Jesus. But there are many ways in which your life can have the mark of God on it. Is your life a ‘distinguishing sign’, making you distinct from those around you so that you stand out as a light in the dark world? Is it obvious to others that you “have not received the spirit which is of the world, but the spirit which is of God” (1 Corinthians 2:12)? We have received the anointing, which, as we saw in the last issue, is what enables us to discern between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of antichrist – but are we exercising that discernment? Can we be counted amongst “those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14)?

Remember, the deciding issue is one of allegiance and worship. Your god is what you worship – how you spend your time, what you give your energy to, where your money goes. Jesus said “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). You will know where your heart’s allegiance lies by seeing where your values lie, and you will see where your values lie by seeing what you do with your time, energy and money. Is your allegiance with the kingdom of God or with the kingdoms of this world? Two things we know for certain: the kingdom of God will prevail when Jesus comes; and until then there is a battle on between these two kingdoms, and that battle is the battle for the allegiance of your heart. Just before Israel entered the promised land, God told them through Moses that their time in the wilderness had been a time of testing and proving, so that God would know what was in their hearts. It is the same for us in this life – our ‘40 years’ is a proving and a testing time for God to see where our allegiance lies, whether we truly want to live for the kingdom of God or for the kingdoms of this world.

EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE

by Joanna Barratt

The Mark Of God

Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. And whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:29-30).

I have no doubt whatsoever that God knew all about me before I was even born. I was not a mistake. Even though circumstances were difficult at my birth, and I was nearly strangled by the umbilical cord - the very thing that was supplying my food, breath, life - God would not allow my life to be snatched away, but preserved me to fulfil his plan for my life.

From an early age I had a hunger for the things of God. I was by no means an angel but Bible stories captured my imagination like nothing else could. They made me very aware that God's eyes were on me which in turn did much to alter the way I lived. Nobody needed to teach me, I just knew instinctively what was acceptable and what wasn't. Some things, with no outside influence or instruction, made me very uneasy. I found it difficult to explain the inward restrictions I felt, and even I could never understand why it was I had no desire to idolise pop stars or listen to all the pop music that had my school friends hooked. I didn't even feel the pressure of 'becoming one of them' by smoking, drinking, taking drugs or indulging in premarital sexual activities. Because of this I was marked and considered 'odd'. Thank God for the 'odd' people he sets to one side for his use! To all intents and purposes I looked the same as everybody else, it was just my lifestyle that was different. If I had worn modest Muslim clothing my lifestyle could have been more understandable, but unfortunately the compulsion to indulge myself with the fashion of my peers more than made up for the restrictions I felt in other areas. This didn't only make me 'odd', but it also made me a hypocrite. I had read God's ruling concerning sexual standards, and knew that indulgence in this area was only permitted inside the boundaries of marriage, yet I 'put the goods in the shop window but wouldn't let anybody buy them'!

Singled Out

Another strange occurrence was the fact that I became so integrated into the family environment of the minister of my church. Because of my disturbed and violent family life I would often run away from home only to end up 2 bus rides away at the ministers house. I didn't know where else to go. There was no point running to my school friends, they weren't Christians and couldn't help relieve my hurting spirit. The Pastor always made me feel welcome, indeed as though I'd been sent specifically to help him or his wife in some area around the house. He would take me out of my situation and build up Christ in me. I would forget my troubles and focus on God, and nothing else mattered after that. When my parents had planned to emigrate to Australia I made it very clear that I didn't want to join them. The problem was that I was underage to be left alone so they had to find someone to become my legal guardian. The Pastor stepped in and signed all the paperwork necessary to enable them to leave me behind. It was apparent to everyone in the church that I was 'well in with the family' and was receiving 'preferential treatment' from the Pastor, which caused much jealousy from certain members. But on the other hand the Pastor confessed to his family that he had always seen God in a special way upon me and couldn't treat me like other people. He nurtured me in the things of God and I blossomed under his care. I never lived with the family, but I was a very regular visitor who was treated like family. I was the only member of his church treated in this manner and to this very day I feel very privileged indeed.

Stranger Than Fiction

The Pastor himself had received some preferential treatment from God. He had an amazing story to tell of when he was a Commando in World War II. He was a Sergeant in the Parachute Regiment and was commissioned to capture a French Chateau in Ranville which the Germans were using as their Headquarters. As they flew over France and the men in his Regiment were dropping over their

Dropping Zone, the plane lurched forward and threw my Pastor, who was not a Christian at the time, back into the plane. Because he feared receiving a white feather for being a coward if he didn't jump, he flung himself out of the plane. He had exited the plane so frantically that the strap which held his sten gun and ammunition snapped leaving him almost defenceless.

The delayed jump from the plane caused him to land miles away from his troops. In fact, he landed so far away from them that he fell right in the middle of the very garden of the very chateau his Regiment had been sent to capture. Nobody noticed him land as there were gunners at each of the corners of the garden firing up into the sky. In the flurry of activity he gathered up his parachute as quickly as possible and ran to hide behind the bushes which grew against the inside wall of the garden. He took stock of what was happening. It didn't take him long to realise the Germans were vacating the premises. People were running about everywhere. As a precaution he took a hand grenade and a fighting knife from his pocket. He took out the pin from the grenade and stuck it in the ground next to the fighting knife. If anyone saw him he planned to shout "Nicht schießen!", which meant "Don't shoot!" in German, throw the grenade and fall to the ground in an effort to defend himself, and hope for the best. Soldiers did walk slowly down the very path where he was hiding, and even pointed their guns in his direction. But just before he threw the grenade they slowly turned away from him, got into one of the vehicles, and drove off, leaving him alone in the Chateau. He spent the night in the building ready to welcome his buddies the next day with the news that he had captured the place single handed.

The following dawn he went to look for his troops, only to find them hanging from chimney pots and trees with furrows up their backs where the German Spandau bullets had ripped them open. God had preserved his life and he was a marked man. God had a purpose for him to fulfil.

When we read in the Old Testament about the way God marked Cain we find that it was as a protection, "lest any finding him should kill him". In the same way when God has marked a man or woman, the devil is not permitted to take them captive at his will as he does with other people.

No Time For God

In April 2006 I heard an incredible testimony from Arthur Mann who had half his face blown away by a hand grenade in the Korean War. He was an awful sight to see after his accident and the medics were convinced that he was dead. He was lying in the morgue, next in line to be sewn into a bag before burial, when he moved and frightened the living daylights out of the man working down there. He was rushed off to hospital and given emergency treatment. After 50 operations they managed to reconstruct his face, but he was terribly marked.

The amazing thing about this incident was that this man was ungodly, he had a foul mouth and was a drunkard. He had no time for God until one day God claimed his life and from the very first week of becoming a Christian he began to preach the gospel and has been preaching and pastoring for the last 50 years. God miraculously healed him but allowed him to keep his facial marks, which are proof of a remarkable testimony.

Near Tragedy

On one occasion, when I was in a car with our music band in the middle of winter, we were turning a corner and went into a skid on the icy road. As we spun round we were heading towards the heavy iron gates and brick wall of a park. I could almost feel the impact even before it happened, but instinctively cried out in a loud voice, "Jesus, save us!". The car came to an abrupt stop inches from the wall, and we all knew without a shadow of a doubt, that God had intervened. In like manner on a trip to Nigeria in 2005 a wagon backed into our parked car. I was sitting on the back seat together with 3 other people, so there was no room to get out of the way of the oncoming vehicle. The back left hand corner of the truck came in through my rear window ready to crush my skull. I watched it coming and couldn't do anything about it. Only after the incident, when we were clearing all the broken glass from my lap and around my feet did I notice that I'd put my left hand up to shield my face and the wagon had smashed the glass in my wristwatch!

The devil cannot touch a marked man or woman. Job had the same protection, the devil was angry because there was a hedge around Job and he couldn't get near him. The devil has to get permission from God to touch a marked person. This mark is one to be coveted. Make sure you receive your mark from God otherwise you are easy meat for the Mark of the Beast.