THE GREATEST FORCE

As we study end-time events related to the mark of the beast, one crucial point that comes through is the difference between how God operates and how the enemy does. As we have been studying, the central issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan focus on authority, loyalty, and worship. The prophecies describing the beast in Revelation 13, the little horn in Daniel 7, and the “son of perdition” in 2 Thessalonians 2 all speak of a power that usurps God’s authority, commands loyalty, and introduces a counterfeit system of worship. They do so using force, coercion, and at times bribes and rewards—all to control worship.

In contrast, love is the great motivating force of the kingdom of God. Rather than worshiping the beast, God’s people find their greatest joy and highest delight in worshiping Him. They are committed to Him because they know how committed He is to them. There is only one thing that will keep any of us from receiving the mark of the beast in the end-time: a love for Jesus so deep that nothing can break our hold upon Him.

In this lesson we will explore these themes further.
Write out Revelation 13 from the translation of your choice. If you are pressed for time, write out Revelation 13:7–9. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
ENDURING FAITH OF JESUS

As we have seen in Revelation 14:7, God calls all people to worship the Creator. This is the first angel's message. In Revelation 14:8 God warns people about “Babylon,” a false religious system with roots in the ancient city of Babylon. This is the second angel’s message. In Revelation 14:9, 10, the third angel warns against worshiping the beast. The angel declares in 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.”

In Revelation 14:12 the Greek word for “patience” is *hupomone*, which is better translated “steadfast endurance.” God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him in the face of opposition and fierce persecution. Through His grace they stand with steadfast endurance, living God-centered, grace-filled, obedient lives.

Worshiping the Creator (Rev. 14:7) stands in direct opposition to worshiping the beast (verse 9) and finds its expression in a people who keep the commandments of God and live by the faith of Jesus (verse 12). This final conflict over allegiance to Christ or to the beast revolves around worship, and at the heart of this concluding act of the great controversy between good and evil will be the Sabbath.

Living by faith, we receive His grace and our lives are changed. The committed followers of the Savior will not only have faith “in” Jesus, they will also have the faith “of” Jesus. Jesus’ quality of end-time faith will be theirs, and they will remain faithful, even unto death, as Jesus did.

Hanging on the cross, enshrouded in darkness, bearing the guilt, shame, and condemnation of the sins of the world, and shut off from the sense of His Father’s love, Jesus depended on the relationship He had cultivated with the Father throughout His life. In other words, through a life of complete dependence upon the Father, even in good times, Jesus had prepared for the worst times. The Savior trusted, even when all around Him the circumstances cried out for Him to doubt. Even when it seemed that God had forsaken Him, Jesus didn’t give up. Ellen G. White sums it up as follows: “Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father’s acceptance heretofore given Him. . . . By faith, Christ was victor” (*Christ Triumphant* [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1999], p. 277).

The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep, so trusting, so committed, that all the trials on earth and all the demons in the cosmos cannot shake it. It is a faith that trusts when it cannot see, believes when it cannot understand, hangs on when there is little to hang on to. This “faith of Jesus” is itself a gift we receive by faith that will carry us through the crisis ahead. It is “the faith of Jesus” dwelling in our hearts that enables us to worship Christ as supreme and to endure steadfastly when Revelation’s mark of the beast comes to fruition.

However, this faith is not something that suddenly appears. God’s people have been learning to live by faith day by day in the here and now, before things have gotten difficult. In good times, in bad times, when God feels close, when He seems far away—it doesn’t matter, for “the just shall live by faith” (Gal. 3:11; see also Hab. 2:4). The time for preparation is now. Every trial now, if endured in faith, can bear precious fruit in our lives that will strengthen us in the difficult times ahead.
The prophecy regarding the mark of the beast is about religious intolerance, an economic boycott, persecution, and eventually a death decree. Surprisingly, it is also a message of encouragement. Even in the worst of times God will sustain His people, who “keep the commandments of God and [have] the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, NKJV). Among those commandments, of course, is the fourth: that of the seventh-day Sabbath.

The mark of the beast prophecy in Revelation 13 tells us about the worst of Satan’s war against God. His first strategy in this campaign is deception. The above passage tells of a time in the future when the devil will work through an earthly religiopolitical power called the beast and will resort to using force to attempt to combat and silence God’s people.

Religious persecution, of course, is not new. It has been around ever since Cain killed Abel for worshiping the way God instructed them to worship (see Gen. 4:1–8). Jesus said persecution would happen even to believers in the first century and would continue down through the ages: “The time is coming.” He warned, “that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2; see also Matt. 10:22; 1 Pet. 4:12).

The prophecy concerning the mark of the beast is about the final link in this ungodly chain of persecution. Like the persecutions of the past, it is designed to force everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and system of worship.

The prophecy says the persecution will involve economic sanctions: No one can “buy or sell” unless they have “the mark.” When this happens, the vast majority of the world’s inhabitants will capitulate. Anyone who refuses will eventually face a death decree.

The devil is preparing professed Christians by compromises in their lives to receive the mark of the beast when the final test comes upon us in the future. God’s love for each one of us will strengthen and preserve us during the troubling times ahead.

The first beast of Revelation 13 receives his power, seat, and great authority from the dragon. Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20:2 identify the dragon as Satan, a cunning foe who works through earthly powers. Revelation 12:3–5 says this “dragon”—the devil—attempted to destroy the “male Child” as soon as He was born. This “male Child” was later “caught up to God and His throne” (verse 5). This, of course, refers to Christ. Desiring to destroy the Christ child, Satan worked through Herod and imperial Rome. At the end of Jesus’ life, a Roman governor, Pilate, condemned Christ to die, a Roman executioner nailed Him to a cruel cross, a Roman soldier pierced Him with a spear, and Roman soldiers guarded His tomb. According to Revelation 13:2, the dragon, Satan, working through pagan Rome, would give the seat of its government to this emerging beast power. The SDA Bible Commentary has this to say regarding the identity of both the dragon and the first beast: “Though primarily representing Satan, the dragon, in a secondary sense, represents the Roman Empire. . . . The power succeeding the Roman Empire, which received from the dragon ‘his power, and his seat, and great authority,’ [KJV], is clearly papal Rome” (vol. 7, p. 817), and historian A. C. Flick explains that “out of the ruins of political Rome arose the great moral Empire in the ‘giant form’ of the Roman Church” (The Rise of the Medieval Church [1900], p. 150, as quoted in The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 817).

(Cont. on p. 93.)
In contrast to “all the world,” who follows the beast, God will have a people who will “follow the Lamb” instead. As always, it will be one side or the other, for Jesus or against Jesus. There will be then, as now, no middle ground, no neutral position. To not firmly commit to Jesus is, consciously or not, to commit to the other side. How ready are you to endure to the end?

(Cont. from inSight, p. 95):

when they will not endure sound doctrine.” 2 Timothy 4:3. That time has fully come. The multitudes do not want Bible truth, because it interferes with the desires of the sinful, world-loving heart; and Satan supplies the deceptions which they love.

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support. (White, The Great Controversy, 593–595.)
OUR ONLY MEDIATOR

The beast of Revelation is an apostate religious power that rises out of pagan Rome and grows to become a worldwide system of worship. According to Revelation 13:5, it is a blasphemous power. In the New Testament, blasphemy is equated with assuming the privileges and prerogatives of God as an equal instead of recognizing His superiority and sovereignty as we ought.

In Luke 5:18–26 Jesus was accused of blasphemy by the religious leaders of His day. In Jesus’ case the accusations were unjust because He had all the powers and prerogatives of God, including the right to forgive our sins, and that is because Jesus is God. Or, as He so powerfully expressed it: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” (John 14:9).

Meanwhile, 1 Timothy 2:5 teaches that there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Jesus Christ. In contrast, the Roman Church teaches that the priest is the mediator between God and sinful humanity. But because the priest himself is a sinful human being, he cannot be our mediator, because he too needs a mediator. Blasphemy is also defined as the claim of any man to be God or to stand in the place of God. Here are just two statements from the Roman Church’s authoritative sources:

“The pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man. . . . he is as it were GOD on earth” (Lucius Ferraris, “Papa,” in Prompta Bibliotheca [1763], vol. 6, pp. 25–29).


These claims become even more relevant when we understand that the word “anti-,” as in anti-Christ, doesn’t always mean “against” but can also mean “in the place of.” Antichrist therefore also means “in place of Christ.” Talk about blasphemy!

Where are other forms of blasphemy have you witnessed?

How has Jesus been your personal meditator?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer Response:

Meditate on this week’s passage again and look for where Jesus is.

Read more at www.inversebible.org/3am11-6
GOD RATHER THAN MEN

From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan's purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God's law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. . . . In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition. (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 582.)

Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God's immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?

Before His crucifixion the Saviour explained to His disciples that He was to be put to death and to rise again from the tomb, and angels were present to impress His words on minds and hearts. But the disciples were looking for temporal deliverance from the Roman yoke, and they could not tolerate the thought that He in whom all their hopes centered should suffer an ignominious death. The words which they needed to remember were banished from their minds; and when the time of trial came, it found them unprepared. The death of Jesus as fully destroyed their hopes as if He had not forewarned them. So in the prophecies the future is opened before us as plainly as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ. The events connected with the close of probation and the work of preparation for the time of trouble are clearly presented. But multitudes have no more understanding of these important truths than if they had never been revealed. Satan watches to catch away every impression that would make them wise unto salvation, and the time of trouble will find them unready.

When God sends to men warnings so important that they are represented as proclaimed by holy angels flying in the midst of heaven, He requires every person endowed with reasoning powers to heed the message. The fearful judgments denounced against the worship of the beast and his image (Revelation 14:9-11) should lead all to a diligent study of the prophecies to learn what the mark of the beast is, and how they are to avoid receiving it. But the masses of the people turn away their ears from hearing the truth and are turned unto fables. The apostle Paul declared, looking down to the last days: “The time will come (cont. on p. 93)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Which appeals to you more, the faith that Jesus had or the faith that we have in Jesus? Why?

What does Matthew 27:45–50 teach us about what Christ experienced on the cross?

What did Jesus mean by asking God why He had forsaken Him? How does this scene help us understand what it means to have “the faith of Jesus”?

What are the basic principles behind the sea beast’s claim to authority? In what ways can those same attitudes be lodged in our hearts without our knowing it?

How do you respond to those who argue that the idea of a literal Satan is a primitive superstition that educated (or at least intelligent) people can’t take seriously?

What are areas in your life in which you need Christ to reign rather than the antichrist/antichrists?