The efforts in the 1880s to nationalize Christianity in the United States included a strong push to legally establish Sunday as the national day of rest. On May 21, 1888, Senator Henry W. Blair presented “The Sunday-Rest Bill,” which was introduced as “a bill to secure to the people the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord’s day, as a day of rest, and to promote its observance as a day of religious worship” (Alonzo T. Jones, *The Two Republics* [1892], 830). The bill would prohibit unnecessary work and recreation that disturbed others on Sundays, and would restrict Sunday mail, commerce, transportation, and military parades, among other things. The U.S. Senate held a public hearing on this bill on December 13, 1888, where Alonzo T. Jones, prolific author, speaker, and religious liberty advocate, voiced the concerns of Seventh-day Adventists and other religious minorities: “Our national Constitution embodies the very principle announced by Jesus Christ, that the civil government shall have nothing to do with religion, or with what pertains to God; but shall leave that to every man’s conscience and his God” (Alonzo T. Jones, *National Sunday Law* [1892], 43). He denied that the government had any right to legislate anything that pertains to our duties to God. On this basis he declared Sunday laws to not only be unconstitutional but also antichristian. Blair’s bill was defeated, but there’s still interest in the issue of Sunday legislation today. This week’s lesson will explore the prophetic significance of all attempts to legislate Sunday observance.
Write out Revelation 14:1–13 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out verses 1–5. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the passage.
Revelation 13 and 14 portray the world as being split into two polarized groups. The first receives the mark of the beast on their foreheads or their right hands along with the beast’s name and number (Rev. 13:16, 17), and the other has the seal of God, which includes the Father's name (Rev. 14:1), placed on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3). These contrasting symbols represent two starkly opposed identities and allegiances. One group marvels at the beast and follows him wherever he goes; the other loves the Lamb and follows Him wherever He goes (Rev. 13:3; 14:4). One imbibes the beast’s deceptions; the other is not deceived (Rev. 13:14; 14:5). One is drunk on Babylon's sins; the other remains pure and undefiled (Rev. 14:4, 8). One conforms to the illegitimate decrees of human government; the other stands faultless before God and His throne (Rev. 13:15–17; 14:5).

As Scripture shows, there has always been at least one people group who faithfully obey God's commandments. For Israel, God's law functioned as both an inward brand or seal on their hearts and an outward sign that set them apart, as Deuteronomy describes: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.... You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes [i.e., on the forehead]” (6:6–8). Israel's obedience to the Ten Commandments and lack of idols in their homes were clear signs of their trust in God. It set them apart from all the nations around them. God's people talked differently. They kept the seventh-day Sabbath while surrounding nations observed Sunday in honor of the sun god. Honorable intrafamily relationships, sexual purity, truth-telling, and respect for human life, property, and other's rights were all very countercultural to the peoples around them. Israel was markedly different, which served as a nonverbal testimony to all they encountered.

The New Testament confirms that God still desires to write His law in our minds (Heb. 8:10) and uphold obedience to His commandments as an outward sign of His people (1 John 2:3, 4). Choosing to keep God's commandments is choosing to announce that our primary citizenship is in heaven, for the world certainly notices that something is different about those who do. Following God’s law indicates whom we belong to and who receives our allegiance.

Obedience does not come from a place of mere duty but from hearts overflowing with love for the Father (1 John 5:3). It comes from accepting God’s love (1 John 4:19), not from any intrinsically human initiative. Our deep love for God empowers us to endure any hardship and remain loyal and obedient to Him through it all.
THE SEAL

Of all the commandments that serve as an outward sign of our allegiance to God, the Sabbath is arguably the most visible. Sabbath keeping that focuses on God’s blessings, His sanctifying work, and our rest (see Gen. 2:3) creates abundant opportunities for sharing our faith. Every time we ask a supervisor for Sabbath work accommodations, decline a friend’s invitation to a Saturday event, or ask a person to find another day to work on our property, we declare that God is the ultimate priority in our lives. Furthermore, because most of the Christian world doesn’t understand the blessings the seventh-day Sabbath brings, true Sabbath keeping reveals to fellow believers the importance God places on Scripture above tradition and on His law above ours. Because the Sabbath is exceptionally relational and visible, it’s not surprising that the Bible highlights the Sabbath (see Ezek. 20:12) as the ultimate sign of our allegiance even beyond the other commandments. Ceasing from our own works on God’s Sabbath is a sign that we acknowledge total reliance on God’s work in our hearts.

Some signs serve very specific purposes. For example, a seal is an official sign that indicates authority and credibility. An official seal contains a title, a jurisdiction, and sometimes a name. The Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 contains all three: the title of Creator, His jurisdiction over all creation, and the name of the Lord God. If the Sabbath commandment is modified or removed from the commandments, God’s seal is missing from His law and His identity as Lawgiver is no longer known. None of the other nine commandments identify God’s title and jurisdiction and they therefore rely on the Sabbath commandment to make the law complete.

The metaphor of having God’s seal on our foreheads represents the reality of the new covenant, under which we are to walk through life with His law emblazoned on our hearts and minds (Heb. 8:10; cf. Isa. 56:1–7). God’s holy Sabbath lies at the heart of God’s holy law. It therefore makes sense that Satan would stir up the most bitter hatred for this centerpiece of God’s commandments. The more we see hostility to the Sabbath increasing, the more prominently true Sabbath keepers stand apart as loyal to the Creator. The seventh-day Sabbath is God’s special and official seal upon those He has a covenant relationship with (Ezek. 20:12, 20). This seal is a gift from God and a work of God. No person can seal themselves or anyone else for eternity; only the power of the Holy Spirit can (Eph. 4:30).

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

What does it look like for an individual to live with the seal of God on their forehead? For a body of believers?
What relationship do the following verses have with Revelation 14:1–13?

Revelation 7:1–3
Revelation 12:17
Revelation 13:11–18
Exodus 20:8–11
Deuteronomy 6:1–9
Hebrews 8:10
1 John 2:3–6

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

The Sabbath Controversy

The scene of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion in Revelation 14:1 brings great relief after the chaos, darkness, and oppression so vividly depicted in Revelation 13. As the prophetic lens shifts from the troubling events of this world back to the heavenly, the reader is assured that God’s voice has not been drowned out and God has not forgotten or lost sight of His people. Those who stand before God’s throne testify by their very presence that He has indeed preserved His people through all the trials they have faced.

The enemy has a sinister strategy to lead God’s people away from being part of this group: the mark of the beast and the crisis when it gains popularity. God’s promise to sustain His people (Rev. 14:1–5) is preceded and followed by a warning against receiving that mark, which is the counterfeit seal of God. It signals loyalty to human laws and traditions whereas the seal signals faithfulness to God’s law above all else. The seal of God is a gift, given along with the promised rest and blessings to those who honor the seventh-day Sabbath (Gen. 2:3; Exod. 20:8–11). If God’s seal involves the true Sabbath, it stands to reason that the mark of the beast involves the counterfeit Sabbath. This counterfeit is defended by human tradition and church dogma, something we see happening even in early church history when religious rulers and counsels asserted the authority to override God’s law (Dan. 7:25). While the Bible makes a strong case for the Sabbath being the sign of God’s authority, the Catholic Church claims that Sunday replaced the Sabbath. Pope John Paul II wrote that Sunday “stands at the heart of all worship” and “is so close to the Church’s heart” (Apostolic Letter “Dies Domini” [May 31, 1998]). It ultimately comes down to worshiping according to God’s way or according to man’s tradition.

These two opposing systems of worship will finally collide when the church gains enough influence over the state to force its false day of worship on the general public. The mark of the beast crisis will play out when the government seeks to enforce church tradition through Sunday legislation. No one will receive the mark of the beast as long as religious freedom remains, but the final showdown between good and evil will come when the main point of contention will be worship.

The last few minutes of a game are often the most intense. Wherever they are, onlookers tend to grow louder and more captivated the closer the conclusion gets. Like the last few minutes of a game, prophecy indicates that the struggle between the beast’s mark and God’s seal will be extra intense given that it will be the final cosmic battle in this world’s history. Now is the time to get to know Christ and exercise faith in Him before it’s too late. No earthly or hellish power can prevent any one of us from being in the group that stands before God’s throne if we practice surrendering our hearts and following the Lamb every day in the here and now (Rev. 14:4, 5).
**inSight**

Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

---

After this week’s study of the passage, what are some personal applications you are convicted of in your life?

What are some practical applications you must make in your school, family, workplace, and church life?

---

Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/RL12-7

---

**THE SUNDAY MOVEMENT REVIVED**

“While the worshipers of God will be especially distinguished by their regard for the fourth commandment,—since this is the sign of His creative power and the witness to His claim upon man's reverence and homage,—the worshipers of the beast will be distinguished by their efforts to tear down the Creator's memorial, to exalt the institution of Rome.” (Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* [1911], 446.)

“Christians of past generations observed the Sunday, supposing that in so doing they were keeping the Bible Sabbath; and there are now true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who honestly believe that Sunday is the Sabbath of divine appointment. God accepts their sincerity of purpose and their integrity before Him. But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God. He is paying homage to Rome and to the power which enforces the institution ordained by Rome. He is worshiping the beast and his image. As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome—‘the mark of the beast.’ And it is not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and the commandments of men, that those who continue in transgression will receive ‘the mark of the beast.’ ” (Ibid., 449.)

“Political corruption is destroying love of justice and regard for truth; and even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance. Liberty of conscience, which has cost so great a sacrifice, will no longer be respected.” (Ibid., 592.)

“Heretofore those who presented the truths of the third angel’s message have often been regarded as mere alarmists. Their predictions that religious intolerance would gain control in the United States, that church and state would unite to persecute those who keep the commandments of God, have been pronounced groundless and absurd. It has been confidently declared that this land could never become other than what it has been—the defender of religious freedom. But as the question of enforcing Sunday observance is widely agitated, the event so long doubted and disbelieved is seen to be approaching, and the third message will produce an effect which it could not have had before.” (Ibid., 605, 606.)

“Those who have been warned of the events before them are not to sit in calm expectation of the coming storm, comforting themselves that the Lord will shelter His faithful ones in the day of trouble. We are to be as men waiting for their Lord, not in idle expectancy, but in earnest work, with unwavering faith.... We should endeavor to disarm prejudice by placing ourselves in a proper light before the people. We should bring before them the real question at issue, thus interposing the most effectual protest against measures to restrict liberty of conscience. We should search the Scriptures and be able to give the reason for our faith.” (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 [1885], 452.)
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.

Do God’s people receive a literal seal on their foreheads? What does it symbolize?

How has the Sabbath given you or your family opportunities to share your faith?

What elements within the Sabbath commandment give it the characteristics of a seal? Why is this so important?

What is the mark of the beast?

How many receive the mark of the beast while religious liberty remains?

Do you think it’s possible for the mark of the beast to begin amassing influence before religious liberty is eradicated?

How can we spiritually prepare for the great challenges that prophecy predicts?

How is God calling you to be more faithful to Him today? What areas of your life do you need to surrender and perhaps leave behind?