

the seal of God & the sabbath

The Image of God & the Adventist Pioneers—4 of 4

KEY TEXT—REVELATION 7:3-4

SCARED AT THE END OF THE WORLD

When you read the book of Revelation, and see the global events that will unfold before the second coming, does it make you afraid? This may be compounded by Jesus' own description of how the world will be separated into two groups before His return (Matthew 24-25). Do you wonder if you will be included among the sheep, or be identified as one of the goats? Such uncertainty can make you scared.

The book of Revelation describes one scene that adds to some people's fear,

Revelation 7:1-4 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. ²Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." ⁴Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

This passage describes imminent judgement by God's angels, but just before this happens, there is a call to wait until God's people have been "sealed" on their foreheads. People may wonder: Am I sealed?, Will I be sealed?, What is this seal? Will I have a microchip in my head?, Am I included in the 144,000?

I want to explain this biblical concept of 'sealing' with some helpful insights from the early Adventist pioneers which I hope will give you security about your own eternal future, but also some important biblical truths about the cosmic importance of the Sabbath in the days before Jesus returns.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS TO THE SEAL OF GOD

- **protection from divine judgement—Revelation 7** The key idea concerning sealing in Revelation 7 is that the seal is given to God's people to protect them from the judgement that will fall upon the wicked at the end of the world.
- **protection from divine judgement—Ezekiel 9** This idea is based on the concept of being marked in the forehead for protection against God's judgement in Ezekiel 9:1-8. In this passage, divine judgement is meted out against those who have rebelled against God.
- **protection from divine judgement—Exodus 12** A similar idea of marking to provide protection against divine is seen in Exodus 12 where the door posts of the Israelite homes are daubed in blood from a sacrifice to protect

God's people from His destroying angel who flew over Egypt in judgement against Pharaoh who held God's people in captivity.

In all these examples, a seal protects because it indicates ownership of an individual by God. But what is this seal that shows you are owned by God and are protected?

In Ephesians 1:13-14, the Holy Spirit is described as "sealing" you when He lives within, guaranteeing your redemption. But another facet for understanding this sealing focuses on the Sabbath.

THE SEAL OF GOD & THE SABBATH

Presbyterian theologian, Meredith Kline, identifies the Sabbath as the seal of God,

[I]t is tempting to see in the sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of . . . the international treaty documents. . . . By means of his sabbath-keeping, the image-bearer of God images the pattern of that divine act of creation which proclaims God's absolute sovereignty over man, and thereby he pledges his covenant consecration to his Maker. The Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the Sabbath as his seal of ownership and authority. (Meredith D. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 16-19)

This is similar to what the early Adventist pioneers taught—that at the end of time, when the world is divided between those who love God and those who stand against Him, the Sabbath is the seal which indicates who belongs to God and are protected. As Ellen White wrote, the Sabbath commandment

is the only one of all the ten in which are found both the name and the title of the Lawgiver. It is the only one that shows by whose authority the law is given. Thus it contains the seal of God, affixed to His law as evidence of its authenticity and binding force. (PP, 307)

JESUS, THE IMAGE OF GOD & THE SABBATH

However, AT Jones asserted, "Saturday keeping is not the seal of God." This appears to go against what Ellen White wrote. However, Jones continued,

Christ, as he is reflected in the Sabbath of the Lord, and in it, in the mind and heart of the believer, in the living image of God completed,—that is the seal of the living God.

WW Prescott emphasises how the seal of God comes by the Holy Spirit who enables an individual to reflect Jesus:

Now someone places a piece of paper in a seal and presses down the lever, the paper is taken out and here is an impression. Now there is a certain agency that does that work. After it is done a certain impression remains. Now the Spirit is the agency in the sealing work. What is the impression that remains? It is the image of God restored in the soul. Who is that image of God? Christ. Then it will be Christ in you, the hope of glory. It all comes right back to that. And the work of the Spirit is to prepare us for, and impress that image upon us. On this point I will read a few words from the REVIEW of Nov. 1, 1892:- "As the wax takes the impression of the seal, so the soul is to take the impression of the Spirit of God and retain the moral Image of Christ.

Prescott then tackles the potential confusion between understanding the Sabbath as the seal and Christ as the seal, by showing the Sabbath and Christ in their true perspective:

But we have always been told that the Sabbath is the seal . . . You will remember in our talk some time since about the Sabbath, we tried to show that in the Sabbath, from every standpoint and on every side, Christ appeared: Christ the creator; Christ the one who makes holy; Christ the sanctifier; Christ the one who blesses us and in whom we are blessed. No one can really and truly keep the Sabbath in whom Christ does not dwell; and the Sabbath is the seal in so far as Christ is recognised in it. Just that far and no farther. It will not seal anyone simply to observe the Sabbath in a formal way, as an outward ceremony. To keep Saturday does not seal anyone any more than to keep Sunday or Monday, in that sense; but only in so far as Christ is seen in the Sabbath is the Sabbath a seal. But the Spirit is the agency by which we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, that Christ may be formed within. Now when the Sabbath is recognised as the institution of Christ, and that Christ is the very essence of the Sabbath, do you not see that when the Sabbath is properly and really kept in the spirit of it, that it is when Christ is received in his fullness. That is to say, you cannot keep the Sabbath without receiving the righteousness of Christ. The fact is, you cannot do anything without receiving it. You may view it on every side, but you will come back to that one point where everything centres, that you must have the righteousness of Christ; you must have Christ dwelling in you.

THE SABBATH & THE END OF TIME

So the Sabbath is symbolic of what is happening within—the restoration of the image of God within an individual. But in the wider context of what God is doing in the great controversy with Satan, the Sabbath acts like a flag for God's people that indicates that they are part of a community led by the Father which is working to restore broken people into the image of God (Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19). As Ellen White emphasises,

The Sabbath is a sign of creative and redeeming power; it points to God as the source of life and knowledge; it recalls man's primeval glory, and thus **witnesses to God's purpose to re-create us in His own image.** (Ellen White, Education, 250)

Therefore, the lack of observance of Sabbath in the world—which indicates a lack of understanding and participation in God's work to restore people in His image—requires a restoration of this cosmic symbol of God's work in the world,

God's people have a special work to do in repairing the breach that has been made in His law; and the nearer we approach the end, the more urgent this work becomes. All who love God will show that they bear His sign by keeping His commandments. They are the restorers of paths to dwell in . . . it is the great memorial of God's creative work. **Its observance is bound up with the work of restoring the moral image of God in man.** (Ellen White, 6T 265)

This explain why Satan is so angry with the Sabbath and why he makes it the target of his attacks before Jesus comes, for it encapsulates everything he hates. On the flip side, it also explains why the Sabbath is worth upholding, no matter the cost, for it testifies—not simply to the continuing importance of God's law—to the purposes and restoring power of the living God to transform every broken person to be like Him.

APPLICATION

- How can the Sabbath give you assurance of salvation?
- How may Sabbath observance give you a witness to the power of God to restore broken people in His image?

1

LIFE POINT

the seal of God provides me protection against His judgements

2

LIFE POINT

the seal of God is Christ within me through His Holy Spirit

3

LIFE POINT

the evidence of sealing is growing deeper into the image of God

4

LIFE POINT

the Sabbath is a cosmic witness of God's work to restore His image