



# My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

## Lesson #26: "The Mark of the Beast"

### Marked!

Today's study researches that mystical mark so dreaded today by religious and superstitious alike. The dire warnings in Revelation given to those who receive the mark of the beast have caused quite a stir. Many people have studied and questioned, "What is it? Is it bar-coding? Could it be your Social Security Number? Is it on a credit card?" Fear of being tricked into receiving that mark has caused many to look with suspicion on the symbols different groups have used to identify themselves and their products.

Certainly God does not intend to trick us into accepting that mark does He? Why, then, is it not specified more clearly what the mark is? That question reminds me of a similar question the disciples asked Jesus. In Matthew 13 they said to Jesus. "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Mark records this answer in Mark 4:11. Jesus said to them. "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables." He went on to explain that those who were already rejecting truth would not be able to understand these mysteries even if they saw and heard them. But to the faithful, loyal children of God, help is given by the Spirit, and the hidden and secret things in God's Word can be understood. (See 2 Corinthians 2:10)

In our last lesson we learned some of the characteristics that mark the beast. We saw that it is fighting against God, it persecutes God's people, it has no regard for God's law and government, and even attempts to change God's law. All of this is done "under cover" however, as this beast leads the people to believe that he is really on God's side. He even works miracles to prove it.

In our lesson this week we will look more closely at "the mark" and will study what it means to be marked. It is interesting to note that not only do those who worship the beast receive a mark, but those who worship God are also marked. How is it done? What does it mean? Who can see it? Is it literal or just symbolic? These are some of the questions that you will find answers to. Our stories today look at some different marks we as humans have used.

### DRUMMED OUT!

My regiment was marshaled on the parade ground, at strict attention. The silence could be felt.

A soldier—one of my friends—had been caught stealing and held for court-marshal. He had been a good soldier so far as training was concerned. He had come from a home with little of this world's goods. On brief furloughs I had taken him to my home in Glasgow, Scotland. On our latest trip he had asked for a loan, but unfortunately I had been broke also. In the barracks the next day he had been caught stealing. At the court-martial I had been called with others as a witness and asked if I had lent him any money. Regretfully I had to answer no. Whence then had the money in his pocket come? The evidence against him was overwhelming. He had been found guilty and sentenced to be drummed out of the British army.

## Lesson 26: The Mark of the Beast

Now, in the awful silence a bugle sounded. The door to the guard room swung open and the prisoner with his guards appeared. A quick march brought them to the assembled troops where they halted before the officers. The colonel in command addressed the prisoner, "Private, you have been found guilty of stealing. You have disgraced your king, your country and your regiment. The court has sentenced you to be drummed out of his majesty's service." Turning to an officer he said, "Captain, you have your orders. Take over."

The captain removed the prisoner's cap, cut off the badge identifying his regiment, and removed from his shoulders the epaulets with the regimental insignia. Next he cut the brass buttons from the man's uniform. The prisoner stood uneasily before the regiment, his shoulders slumped, his head hanging.

"Remove him from the barracks," ordered the captain. With a sad, sad heart I saw my friend standing alone, bearing his tragedy before the regiment.

Slowly the drummers began a tattoo. As the sound rose in a swelling crescendo like the roll of approaching thunder, the guards marched the disgraced man to the gate and ordered him to leave. Rejected by his majesty the king, banished from the army forever, my disgraced friend ran down the street. The rolling drums suddenly ceased. The ceremony of disgrace was over.

As I read this sad story, I was struck with the importance of the symbols that were cut off of his uniform. While he was a loyal soldier he was allowed to wear the emblems of honor that marked him as a member of the king's army. Those symbols not only identified whose army he belonged to, but they also implied something about the character and behavior of the wearer. When he broke the laws of the king, his actions proved that he was not worthy of the character implied by those ensigns, and he was no longer allowed to bear those marks.

The emblems on his uniform were easily visible. His character was not so easily visible. The Bible says that man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Our next story illustrates one of those less easily seen marks of character.

### **The Secret**

To the casual onlooker it may seem that some successful men and women have had a streak of good luck. But when we get to know these people who are doing things, we find that luck did not enter into their success. And there is no magic formula. It is no secret.

A number of years ago the head of the great Carnegie Steel Company, one day said to the head of the drafting department, "Al, I would like to have your best man for some special work."

"But my men are all good men," the head of the department replied. "I don't have a No. 1 man."

A few days later an order came from the managers' office asking every man in the drafting room to work two hours overtime each working day.

After some weeks of these extra hours in the department the manager inquired, "How do the men like the accelerated program?"

"Like it? They don't like it. They are kicking about it—all but one man."

"And who is that?" inquired the manager.

"His name is Charlie Schwab. He just eats work. He seems to enjoy it."

"Send him to my office," the manager requested. "He is your No. 1 man--he's the man I was asking about." And the world knows that Charlie Schwab became steel king--an outstanding man in the industry.

Only a thoughtful discerning eye could pick out a mark of character like that. But God searches our hearts and discerns every tendency we have whether for good or for evil. How thankful I am that as we surrender to Him and cooperate with Him He can remove the evil tendencies and replace them with the character of Jesus. How I long to have Him finish writing His law in my heart so He can seal it for Himself forever.

## **Branded for Life**

The young man struggled fiercely with his captors. He was not about to give up easily. Then it happened! A knifelike pain seared the skin on his forehead as they over-powered him, held him down and applied the hot iron to his tender flesh. He screamed and struggled again, but it was no use. He was helpless in their vice-like grip.

The smell of burning flesh filled the air as they continued their terrible work. Then it was over. The boy was free. He ran for water to cool the ugly red burns on his forehead. The cool water brought a little relief to the stinging throbbing pain, but nothing eased the pangs in his heart. He looked in the mirror. The letters "ST" glared back at him. How could he face life mutilated like this? People would stare, wonder, question, taunt. The only answer to their merciless questions would be, "'ST' means stealer. They caught me stealing and my punishment was to be branded so that everyone would know I'm a thief"

Hopelessness settled over him like a fog. There seemed to be no way out. Forgiveness such as God offers seemed to be beyond his reach. He was forever doomed, forever marked. The burns healed, the skin no longer hurt, but each time someone looked at the scars, he felt the stares and burned with shame.

There seemed to be no balm, no ointment to ever heal the pain in his heart. As time passed however, he found the "Balm of Gilead". He found the comfort, the solace the strength that comes to the one who seeks help and forgiveness from Jesus. As his repentance for his past life of sin deepened, his resolve to live a noble, honest upright life increased. He didn't see how it would be possible to do much for God with the shameful brand on his forehead but he determined to make the best he could of a bad situation.

As he spent time learning of the lovely Savior, his life came to reflect the One he loved. Kind words, thoughtful acts, loving deeds became natural to him. While still shunned as a condemned criminal, the people in the community got used to seeing the branded forehead. Everyone knew what the "ST" stood for so the curious questions died down.

As the years went by little by little his quiet unassuming life full of gentleness and honesty broke down the prejudices of the people. They became used to seeing him in church, and the little children learned to love him before they even learned the ABCs. They grew up knowing him as a loving friend they felt safe with, and the brand on his forehead just seemed to be a natural part of him.

Eventually, the story behind the mark on his forehead was almost forgotten. One day a little fellow stood looking at his big kind friend. He was just learning to read and was trying to read everything he saw. "S-T" his lips moved and his forehead knotted as he tried to figure out the letters on the man's forehead. "S-T". Tugging at his young mother's hand he again tried to sound out the letters. "Mother,

## Lesson 26: The Mark of the Beast

what does that say on his head?" he asked. "Well, it just says 'S-T'", his mother replied, "It doesn't spell a word."

"But why Mommy?" he asked innocently, "Why does he have those letters on him?"

Mother was silent for a moment. "I'm not sure son," she replied, "Those letters have a meaning but I've forgotten what it is. The only thing I can think of is that they must mean 'saint'." Satisfied with that explanation the young boy went back to his play.

What a flood of joy those words must have brought to that then elderly man's heart. Men had placed a mark of condemnation on the outside, but God had made a mark that was more important. God had made a mark on the delicate, tissue of the mind just inside that forehead. God had made a mark on his character. He had written something in his heart. God's hidden mark could be seen and interpreted by man in spite of the visible mark man had placed on him.

Friends, I believe that the mark that will be received in the last days, whether the mark of the beast, or the seal of the living God, will be more than skin deep. Something more is involved here than externals.

All will be marked. Even humans will be able to discern the difference between those who have the mark of the beast and those who do not. But they may not realize what the difference is. All they will see is that these people that God has marked as His are different and they don't like the difference. They will try to force them to worship as they do, not knowing that it is the beast they are worshipping.

May God bless you as you seek to walk humbly with your God seeking to learn His will, His ways, His laws, and His character so that He may mark you as His friend for eternity.