

eventually be faced by those who are unwilling to give up their conscientious commitment to truth: “no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, of the number of his name.” The situation becomes more serious still when, according to Revelation 13:15, “as many as would not worship the image of the beast [should] be killed.” The only way we will be able to survive is to have absolute confidence in Christ’s ability and willingness to protect and provide for us.

Sealed for Eternity

In this time of crisis, God’s faithful people will be sealed by the Holy Spirit and will stand firm in their convictions to follow Him. Seals were distinctive marks used in ancient times to attest to the authenticity of official documents. Since the final conflict is over worship and God’s authority, we would expect God’s seal to be embedded in His law. The Sabbath commandment in the heart of God’s law contains God’s seal.

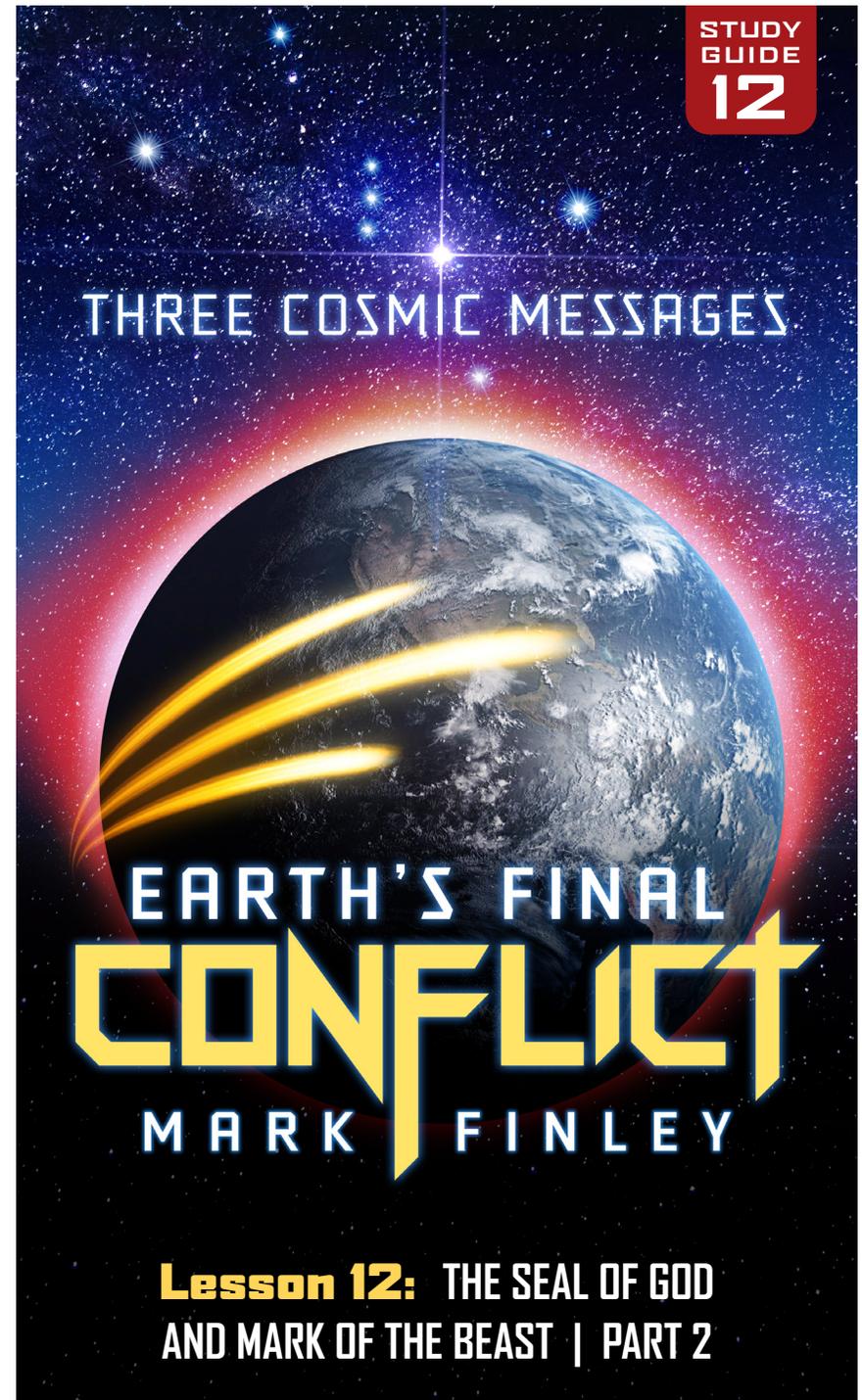
5. What elements of a seal are contained in the Sabbath Commandment? (*Exodus 20:8–11*)

Here we see three elements of an authentic seal: 1) the name of the originator of the seal, “the LORD your God,” 2) the title of the sealer, the “one who made, “or the Creator, and 3) His territory, “the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.”

According to Revelation 7:2–3, the seal of God is placed on the forehead. The forehead is a symbol of the mind and represents a conscious decision—in this case, based on the teachings of His Word. The mark of the beast is received in the forehead or in the hand, indicating that people accept Satan’s lies either by choice or by being forced against their will.

The Sabbath affirms the relationship between the Creator and His people. Sabbath observance is the seal by which we ratify our acceptance of the authority of our Creator.

God’s last-day message comes to a climax when the Apostle John, in prophetic vision, describes a group of grace-filled, end-time believers who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Saved by grace, their hearts are filled with the faith of Jesus. It frees them from the guilt of the past, delivers them from the bondage of sin in the present, and fills their hearts with hope for the future. Through His power, they give him their allegiance and serve and obey Him forever.



THE FINAL CONFLICT IN THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL IS OVER WORSHIP.

This was the topic of our previous study. A rebel angel challenged the government of God, claiming that God's commands are arbitrary and cannot be obeyed. Saved by grace, Christ's faithful followers willingly serve Him because they know that His ways are the ways of lasting joy. Satan attempts to pull off his greatest delusion of all time through a religious counterfeit called the beast power. This power arises in Rome and becomes a worldwide system of worship. Let's continue further identifying this power.

1. What key word is used to describe the beast power? (*Revelation 13:1, 6*)

Blasphemy is mentioned as one of the identifying features of the beast power.

2. How does the Bible use the term blasphemy? (*John 10:33; Luke 5:21*)

Blasphemy is described as: 1) a person pretending or claiming to be God, and 2) a person claiming the power to forgive sins. The Roman Catholic Church has two distinctive doctrines that the Bible identifies as blasphemy. One is attributing to the pope the office of God on earth. The other is attributing to its priests the power to forgive sins.

Lucius Ferraris wrote, "The Pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were God, and the vicar of God" (*Prompta Bibliotheca*, vol. 6, pp. 26–29). Pope Leo XIII boasted: "We [popes] hold upon this earth the place of Almighty God" (*The Great Encyclical Letters*, June 20, 1894).

With regard to forgiveness, another prominent Catholic author wrote, "Seek where you will, throughout heaven and earth, and you will find but one created being who can forgive the sinner, who can free him from the chains of sin and hell; and that extraordinary being is the priest, the Catholic priest" (Michael Müller, *God the Teacher of Mankind*, p. 332).

3. What warning does Paul give us? (*2 Thessalonians 2:3–4*)

4. What is another crucial characteristic identifying this power? (*Revelation 13:5*)

As mentioned in previous lessons, one prophetic day equals one literal year. Multiplying the time period mentioned in Revelation 13:5 of 42 months times the 30 days in a Hebrew month, we come up with 1260 prophetic days or literal

years. In A.D. 538, Roman emperor Justinian officially granted the Roman bishop the role of definer of heretics and defender of the faith. Exactly 1260 years later, in 1798, Napoleon's General Berthier took the Pope captive. The papacy exercised great influence for 1260 years, from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798.

The captivity of the pope fulfilled Revelation's prophecy: "He who *leads into captivity shall go into captivity*" (*Revelation 13:10, emphasis supplied*). The blow to the papacy was extremely serious, but not fatal.

According to Revelation 13:12, the deadly wound would be healed. The papacy's influence would once again be felt worldwide. In a world of instability, the scene is being set for the Roman pontiff to become the purported moral leader of the world.

Have you ever wondered what vehicle the devil might use to unite society? Constantine passed the first Sunday law to unite his empire. The Roman church reinforced that decree in church councils by making Sunday the sacred day of worship. Renowned historian Arthur Weigall wrote, "The church made a sacred day of Sunday... largely because it was the weekly festival of the sun; for it was a definite Christian policy to take over the pagan festivals endeared to the people by tradition, and to give them Christian significance" (*The Paganism in Our Christianity*, p. 145).

A common day of worship has the potential to unite a divided world. To change the law of God, one must have authority that is higher than God's authority. Since the change of the Bible Sabbath was instituted by a church-state union in the early centuries, worship on the first day of the week represents submission to papal authority rather than to the Creator of the universe.

Louis Gaston Segur, in his treatise on the authority of the Catholic Church writes, "Thus the observance of *Sunday* by the Protestants is an homage they pay, in spite of themselves, to the authority of the [Catholic] Church" (*Plain Talk about the Protestantism of Today*, p. 213).

Another remarkable statement removes all doubt as to what the issues really are: "Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change was her act..., and the act is a mark of her ecclesiastical power and authority in religious matters" (C.F. Thomas, *Letter to Cardinal Gibbons*, Oct. 28, 1895).

Prophecy predicts that, at a time of international crisis, the papal power will emerge as the moral leader of the world. Sunday worship will be promoted as a world day of unity for the good of mankind. Sunday laws will be enforced to benefit society and protect the sanctity of the family. The stage is being set for this universal decree even now.

During a speech in June 2012 to more than 15,000 people in St. Peter's Square in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI declared that "Sunday must be a day of rest for everyone, so people can be free to be with their families and with God" (*Catholic News Service*, June 6, 2012). The pope stated, "By defending Sunday, one defends human freedom." Eventually, those who conscientiously follow the Word of God and keep the true Sabbath of the Lord will be labeled as opposing unity and the good of society. Revelation 13:17 reveals the pressures that will