

This Just In

by Tricia Berg

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Revelation 14:9-13

Wow. I am just stunned at the information I came upon this weekend! I had no idea about this. It was so shocking that, naturally, I checked it out carefully. Sadly, I found it to be a true report, and so I am writing to warn you.

What is it? I just realized that John MacArthur, a respected preacher and teacher, has gone on record (years ago, but he stands by it) as saying that taking the mark of the beast can be repented of so that someone who has done so can still be saved. This is so utterly unbiblical that I am absolutely horrified and upset. I have John MacArthur's Hymns of Grace, the NKJV Study Bible anniversary edition and some of his books. I have defended him when people said that he was heretical because of his "Lordship" beliefs. To me, that means we OBEY Jesus because He SAVED us, and His indwelling Spirit produces fruits of repentance and the good works which were prepared for us in advance to do to His glory, which are evidence of saving faith as defined by James and by Jesus Himself (Jam. 1:22-27, Jam. 2:14-26, Matt. 7:13-29, Luke 6:43-49, Eph. 2:8-10, John 15:8-10)—but critics say that the teaching is obeying Him TO BE saved. Some of people in the "no repentance, no works camp" truly appear to love and champion sin, which is not a fruit of the Spirit. (Jude 1:17-22) The way is narrow, though, so we need to strive to achieve balance (stable footing) rather than erring into legalism or overt permissiveness. (Matt. 7:13-29, 2Pet. 3:17-18)

I also understood where Mr. MacArthur was coming from with his Strange Fire conference to combat some of the crazy things people do, claiming that it's of the Spirit— such as rolling on the floor in hysteria, barking like a dog, etc. I

disagreed that God took away some of His GENUINE gifts (not faked, as in some cases) during these end times when they are so desperately needed. There are two witnesses prophesying in Rev. 11:3, and so obviously that gift has not ended altogether. One of the stated purposes of Daniel's 70th week is to "seal both vision and prophet." Since NONE of that week has been fulfilled as yet, then that gift will NOT cease until then.

"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place." Daniel 9:24

But perhaps we just have a difference in definition. Not all prophecy is intended to be added to the Bible, and I don't think anyone is making that claim—even MANY of the amazing things that God spoke to the prophets and did through them in both the Old and New Testaments has NOT been written down. (Psalm 40:5, John 20:30, John 21:25) However, I still understood why Mr. MacArthur felt the need to confront the madness happening in some places—like "gold dust" falling from the ceiling (?) and "worship" that is more like a rock concert, with the focus on the "performers" and self instead of God.

I had some differences with Mr. MacArthur in beliefs on the details of the rapture that I felt, again, might be mostly matters of definition. For example, only the Church of Philadelphia is promised to be kept from the hour of trial (which is the reign of the beast)—so when he says that the entire Church escapes it, I figured he meant everyone who has been tested through persecution and has been found genuine, not needing any further trial. As Paul said, we are not really even able to judge ourselves, but God is just. (1Cor. 4:2-6, 1John 3:19-24, Heb. 6:9-12)

Mr. MacArthur believes that the Church need not be overly concerned about the mark of the beast, since he believes it is part of God's wrath and that the entire church is in heaven at that point. However, the Bible differentiates between "tribulation" and "God's wrath." Jesus said that the signs in the sun, moon and stars will occur AFTER the great tribulation in Matt. 24:29, whereas Joel says that those same things will occur BEFORE the Day of the Lord in Joel 2:30-31. So a dividing line has been established between "tribulation" (which is always for our GOOD, for refining and purifying, as Dan. 11:33-37 and Dan. 12:10 say specifically with regard to the tribulation) and "wrath" (which is God's anger poured out on unbelievers). The intense persecution referred to in seal 5 (Rev. 6:9-11) occurs before the signs in the sun, moon and stars at seal 6 (Rev.

6:12-16), which is understood by the inhabitants of the earth at that time as the beginning of God's wrath.

*"Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Matthew 24:29*

*"And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, **before** the great and awesome day of the LORD comes." Joel 2:30-31 (Also see the rest of Joel 2, Isa. 13 and Isa. 24:17-23.)*

*When He opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the whole moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their **wrath** has come, and who can stand?" Revelation 6:12-17*

If we incorrectly define "wrath" as including the entire tribulation (including Satan's wrath, not God's), then it follows that the Church is not subject to it. (John 3:36, Rom. 1:18-21, Rom. 2:4-11, Rom. 5:9, Eph. 5:6, Col. 3:5-6, 1Thess. 1:9-10) I believe this is a dangerous teaching, as it leaves people unprepared if they do end up being faced with the test—to take the mark, or be taken into captivity or be killed with the sword. (Rev. 13:10, Dan. 11:33, Jer. 15:2, Jer. 43:11) Anyone who says that God wouldn't let His children be tested or even chastised in that way has not read the Bible. How about Joseph? (Gen. 37-50) How about the twelve apostles? (Yes, I know John was not killed, but Paul was, and that makes twelve.) Did God not love them as much as us? That's an absurd thought, right?

Another reason used for saying the entire Church is in heaven for the entire tribulation is because of when "the man of sin" will be revealed. Again, a difference of definition. Is "revealed" when he makes a peaceful treaty and everyone admires him for "saving the day", or is it when he commits the abomination that makes desolation half-way through his "covenant with many" (Dan. 9:27—this is NOT Jesus—He didn't make a 7-year covenant and then break

it by dying, and the "daily sacrifice" did not end then, either, even though it ceased to be acceptable to God—Jesus was "cut off but not for Himself" at the end of 62 weeks - Dan. 9:26 - there is a big gap between, which is the church age, just as the millennium is inserted without mention between 1Cor. 15:23 and 1Cor. 15:24).

It seems to me that the abomination that makes desolation would be the point when the antichrist is "revealed" since he then displays his true nature (after Satan has fallen from heaven and enters into him as he did Judas - Luke 22:3, John 13:27). It appears to me that these events (Satan falls along with 1/3 of heavenly host, abomination of desolation, beginning of hour of trial) happen in rapid succession during the middle of the seven years (Revelation, chapters 12-13). The abomination is a sign to the Jews in Judea to flee to the mountains. (Matt. 24:15-16, Dan. 11:27-39) They will SEE it, so we know it's not a spiritualized, invisible thing. (And of course, we know that God is not "finished" with Israel and has not replaced them, but the Church is grafted in to their blessings. Rom. 11, Eph. 2:11-22, John 10:16, Isa. 54, Jer. 31, Jer. 33)

One side note, it has come to my attention that the KJV uses "day of Christ" instead of "day of the LORD" in the passage below. That term IS used in passages that appear to deal with Jesus' dealing His own servants in Phil. 1-2, but not here.

*Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and **the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.** Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12*

I have to ask the obvious. How on earth is anyone going to "repent" of taking the mark (which we have NO reason to believe can be removed at all) when they have received a great delusion from God to believe the lie because they delighted in sin and hated the truth? How is someone who has been deceived BECAUSE their name is NOT in the Lamb's Book of Life going to REPENT of having taken the mark?

Mr. MacArthur says that this is not the "unpardonable sin" of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. It isn't? Let's review what that is, shall we? The Jews accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of Satan. (Matt. 12:22-32) Satan will be doing miracles by his own power and people will be worshiping him as God. (John 5:42-43) That sounds like it fits the description to me, not to mention the mark is not only to buy and sell. It is a symbol that the person accepting it acknowledges Satan as "god." We CANNOT eat from the table of demons AND the Lord. Our God is a jealous God. The Israelites who worshiped the golden calf at the base of the mountain PERISHED. (1 Cor. 10:1-22)

Paul strove to obey the entire law before Jesus made him His own (Acts 22:3, Acts 9:16, Phil. 3:12), but still called himself a former blasphemer. Why? Because like his fellow Jews, he attributed the works of Jesus to the devil. He believed that the true Son of God was a blasphemer for making that claim, and he sought to wipe out His followers. (John 10:31-33) But Jesus personally corrected Paul's erroneous beliefs, which were out of ignorance. How will someone during the hour of trial claim ignorance when an angel from heaven sets the record straight right from the start? (Rev. 14:9-13)

*Jesus answered: **"Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."** Matthew 24:4-13*

These are serious issues! Mr. MacArthur is using the wisdom of men to reason out that in his own personal understanding, many are saved during the tribulation and so God "has to" let them repent or things couldn't unfold

according to his own fallible understanding. Part of it was covered above, that the group in Rev. 7:9-17 "can't" be the Church, since that doesn't fit his viewpoint on the ENTIRE Church not going through ANY tribulation. I would really like to see him explain this to the early church. One reason the Thessalonians needed to be reassured that the Day of the Lord wasn't already at hand is that they were undergoing such severe persecution that it seemed that way. (2Thess. 1:4-2:2) What Paul tells them, in effect, is that their suffering is a GOOD sign, because it shows that they are being made worthy of His calling. (Phil.1:27-30)

*Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and **all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.** ... 13 It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and **by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth**, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. Revelation 13:7-8, 13-14*

Jesus said to cut off whatever part of your body causes you to sin, and we are His Body. (Matt. 18:7-9) Does He give us advice that He is not willing to take? He also said that He will cut apart the unfaithful servant and throw him into the darkness outside (Matt. 24:44-51, 25:24-30) That Greek word for "cut apart" is where we get the word "dichotomy" from. So there is a division involved. Perhaps that person is being cut from the Body of Christ? He clearly did NOT abide in Jesus' love and bear fruit as we were instructed to do in John 15:1-14. Jesus warned in advance that to abide, we must obey His commands (which He summarized into two that will fulfill them all - Mark 12:28-34, Rom. 13:8-10) and bear fruit (of the Spirit's indwelling), or be thrown out and burned. We can't just say we don't like that teaching and only listen when He says:

*"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up **on the last day**." John 6:37-40*

How do we reconcile the two teachings? I believe there are a few things that can help us figure it out. One is the obvious difference between His casting out

or allowing someone to be snatched from His hand and a person wrestling themselves out of His hand (or "despising their birthright" as Esau did). But what about His saying in one place He will NEVER cast out those who come to Him and saying the one who doesn't bear fruit will be thrown out? We can either say that the one who was thrown out never really came to Him, but was a false confessor (very possible, but they are "cut off" which makes it sound like they were "attached to the vine" at one time), or another possibility is to examine our understanding of what is meant by "last day."

Paul said that he was "striving" to be found IN Jesus (and all who are mature should join him in this line of thinking), to share in His suffering so that he could attain to the resurrection. This involves fighting the good fight and running the good race. If we live as enemies of the cross and our "god is our belly" we will be destroyed (sounds like unfruitful branches being burned). (Phil. 3:7-21) "Compete by the rules" and suffer in order to receive the crown [like Philadelphia] and the first share of the crops. Paul cryptically tells Timothy to ask God for understanding of the saying. (2Tim. 2:3-7) We must put off sin and run the race with endurance, not trading in our firstborn inheritance for a "bowl of soup" (gratification of our flesh and sinful nature) like Esau. (Heb. 12)

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? **So run that you may obtain it.** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27*

Since we know that we can't earn salvation, and everyone will be resurrected—even unbelievers, Paul was obviously referring to something else. I believe that "something" is the FIRST resurrection. (Rev. 20:4-6) Everyone else (and I think that includes people who did not overcome, but will enter as through the fire - 1Cor. 3:11-18) will be resurrected on the "last day." (Rev. 20:7, Rev. 20:11-15) I believe that a foreshadow of this was enacted by Jesus in John 7:2, John 7:37-39, Rev. 22:1, Rev. 22:17) This would fulfill the "last great day" of the Feast of Tabernacles, God with us—the rest of the days of which will have been fulfilled by Jesus' millennial reign. Then will begin eternity. (1Cor. 15:24-28)

So then this may help to reconcile "all who *call on the name of the Lord* will be saved" with "not everyone who *calls me 'Lord, Lord'* will enter the kingdom. Jesus will remove *all that causes sin* from His kingdom. (Matt. 13:41-43 - again, "he who has ears" should listen, as in the letters to the churches.) Am

I saying that false confessors should expect ANYTHING (except wrath) from Jesus? No. But I am saying that it is necessary to overcome to enter the kingdom, and that involves putting Jesus FIRST. It really comes down to who and what you love. Read chapters 14 and 15 of John carefully. We're not keeping the letter of the law in order to save ourselves (impossible!) or even prove to Jesus that we love Him. We're simply pouring ourselves out for Him because that's what He did for us, because we love Him who first loved us. (2Tim. 4:6, Matt. 26:26-28, 1John 4:8-10, 1Pet. 1:8-9, 2Cor. 6:11-13) We don't show someone our love by constantly disregarding their wishes. If our hearts are truly "circumcised," then we will worship God in truth and spirit, not with empty words or rituals. (Rom. 2:28-29, John 4:23, Mark 7:6-9)

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because **God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but **God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Romans 5:1-8*

*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the **goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us,** not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom **he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,** so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 3:3-8*

For myself, I like to always keep in mind that no one can contribute to their own salvation—Jesus paid it all—but a true child of God will have the desire to know and do God's will, showing evidence of saving faith. (1John 2-3, 2Pet. 1:8-9) Remember, all ten virgins had oil at the outset in Matt. 25:1-13. The oil represents the word of God which is a light to our feet and lamp for our path (Psalm 119:105)—just what the virgins NEED when they hear the midnight cry

to meet the bridegroom. Faith comes from hearing the word of God, and if we don't, then we take chances with the most valuable possession we ever had or ever will have. Definitely not worth it! (Some denominations teach that faith comes also by observing the Lord's Supper or water baptism, but that is not found in the Bible.)

This next passage was written to the Levites. Can we learn anything from it? I believe we can, since we are a royal priesthood, therefore everything we do and say reflects on the glorious God we serve. (1Pet. 2:9-12) I see this same scenario described in the passage below happening today. People look around themselves and think that nothing bad happens to people who care nothing about pleasing God. Even many believers go along with the flow and say there's no need to exercise self-control—it's all covered by grace (but one of the fruits of the indwelling Spirit is self-control, so what does that say about people who don't exhibit it and even criticize those who care about holiness, calling them "self-righteous"?) (Gal. 5:16-25, Rom.6, Heb. 12:14, Rom. 8:9)

*"Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' **You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'"** Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him." Malachi 3:13-18 (Also see John 12:26)*

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age**, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people **for his own possession who are zealous for good works**. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Titus 2:11-15*

God doesn't let us go or let anyone take us from Him, that is true—but those examples are external things outside of our control, such as severe persecution.

(Rom. 8:31-39, Acts 5:41, Rom. 8:16-17, Heb. 10:32-35) He doesn't FORCE us to believe or obey Him, which is to love Him (John 14:15-24)—but make no mistake, the kingdom promises are TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. (1Cor. 2:9, 1Pet. 1:6-9, Jam. 1:12, Heb. 6:11-12, Gal. 5:19-25) If it were impossible to do, we wouldn't be told not to quench the Holy Spirit. (1Thess. 5:19) The warning is for our benefit, because it is necessary to hold fast if we want to receive all that we hope for. (Phil. 2:14-16, Col. 2:18-19, 1John 2:28-29) The example given of holding fast to our spouse in marriage represents our relationship with Christ. (Matt. 19:4-6, Eph. 5:22-32, 1Cor. 6:12-20) All seven letters to the churches in Rev. 2-3 were to be read by each church with good reason. They each say "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" because there are lessons for BELIEVERS in all of them (not just the letter to Philadelphia that we LIKE the best—to me, they are the modern-day prisoners of the Lord like Paul throughout Acts and his letters, and Peter in Acts 12).

As I've written previously, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins is very concerning to me. All ten had lamps and oil at the outset, but only five were READY when the Bridegroom came. What's worse, the foolish were told that He STILL didn't know them AFTER they returned, having presumably made a purchase of oil? Wow. If this happens at the beginning of the hour of trial, then it would appear that in order to buy anything, they had to take the mark. No wonder He doesn't KNOW them. They're children of the devil now! I'm not saying this is absolutely the correct interpretation of the parable, but there is NO interpretation where it is not TRAGIC that the foolish virgins were turned away. I can hardly hold back the tears each and every time I think about it!

The Bible says that whoever takes the mark will be tormented in the lake of fire forever. That is exactly what terrifies every God-fearing person, right? It doesn't get any more serious than that! Here's a question. Why would God go to the trouble not only of recording that information for us in the Bible, but during the hour of trial/reign of the beast—an angel will proclaim it, if it is not CRUCIAL that EVERYONE understand? Has God given Mr. MacArthur special instructions to give people permission to disregard the clear teaching of the Bible? Obviously even Mr. MacArthur doesn't believe that, or he wouldn't have held the Strange Fire conferences (and of course, if ANYONE has "special" revelation that goes against the Bible, then it is NOT from God.)

So we can be confident that Mr. MacArthur is not saying he has special revelation. Then why is he teaching this? Here is a link to the answer he posted on his website in response to the uproar against his erroneous teaching: <https://www.gty.org/library/Blog/B131030> He says it's because the Bible "doesn't say" that you "can't" repent of taking the mark. That reminds me of

baptizing infants because it "doesn't say" not to. It's common sense. Babies have not yet committed any sins to be washed from and have no concept of what sin even is, let alone intention to turn from it and follow Christ. The Bible doesn't say "be 'baptized with the sprinkling of water' so that you will believe" or "faith comes from being baptized with water." But I digress.

Since we know that Satan's purpose in all of this is to imitate God and divert worship from God to himself, we can then apply that knowledge to the mark of the beast. What is its purpose? It's obvious. God seals people with the Holy Spirit to mark them as His. Satan wants to seal people with his mark as well, since he desires to "be" God. (He also causes someone with a fatal head wound to appear to come back to life, which reminds me of how John the Baptist was beheaded. The "heads" of the beast symbolize both mountains and kings. Rev. 17:9-11, Rev. 13:3, Rev. 13:12-14) So the mark of the beast is a **counterfeit seal**.

When we were born, we inherited a sinful nature due to the fall of Adam, but had not yet sinned. (Psa. 51:5, Rom.5:12-13, Rom. 7:9, Isa. 7:15-16, Rom. 7:9) At that time we belonged to God, who owns the earth, including everyone and everything in it. (Psa. 24:1) Then we became self-aware, learned right from wrong, and we ALL sinned. (Rom.3:2-26) At that point, we unknowingly placed ourselves in the domain of darkness, the "kingdom" of Satan. (Eph. 2:1-3, 2Cor. 4:3-4) But thanks to God, we heard the Good News and received the opportunity to have our sins washed away by Jesus' blood (but not everyone accepts the gift of faith). (1John 4:10, 1John 1:5-10)

Our "former sins" were committed in ignorance. (Acts 17:30) For example, the men crucifying Jesus "knew not what they did." They knew they were causing Him severe pain and taking His life, but they thought it was justified—they didn't understand that He was the innocent Son of God. (Luke 23:32-43) Paul was not aware that by persecuting Christians, he was persecuting Jesus. He thought he was doing the right thing by rounding them up, confiscating their property, and having many of them put to death. (Acts 7:58-8:3, Acts 22:3-8, Acts 9:4-5, Acts 26:9-11, 1Tim. 1:13-14)

We probably knew it when we did wrong, but we didn't understand that the penalty for it would be death—that God is HOLY and sees it ALL. (Acts 3:17-21, Heb. 4:13, Rom. 6:23, but read the whole chapter to understand that grace is not a license to sin.) Sometimes we convince ourselves that there is nothing wrong with what we do, since everyone around us thinks it's okay. But God has given us each a conscience (the "law written on our hearts"), and so unless we

sear it so that we can no longer hear it prompting us to do what is right, we DO know better. (Rom. 2:14-16, Rom. 1:18-20, 1Tim. 4:1-2)

When we accepted the message of repentance and forgiveness, along with the corresponding gift, we were transferred from the kingdom of the "ruler" or "god" of this world (Satan) into the glorious kingdom of the Son of God—we became "citizens of heaven." (Col. 1:13-14, Eph. 2:4-10) We became a new creation in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk as Jesus walked, in a manner worthy of Him and His calling. (2Cor. 5:17, 1John 1:5-2:6, Eph. 4)

Being born again into God's family is a ONE time event. (John 1:12-13) Our names are written in the Lambs' Book of Life. (Heb. 12:22-24) We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. If we would rather be children of the devil, "despising our inheritance" and forsaking it, there is no turning back. (Heb. 6:4-9, Heb. 10:23-39, Heb. 12) (It's not something you can do accidentally, so if you feel grieved by your behavior and want to receive a fresh start from God then you CAN repent, receive forgiveness and cleansing, and be restored to fellowship with God and your brothers and sisters in Christ. 2Cor. 2:6-11)

However, there IS such a thing as "blotting out" a name from the Book of Life. Those in Sardis were told that IF they overcome by correcting the deficiencies Jesus pointed out, THEN their names would not be blotted out. THEN they would "walk with Him in white" like those who had not "soiled their garments." (Rev. 3:1-6, Jam. 1:27, Heb. 12:14, Rev. 21:27) So while we do NOT save ourselves, our inheritance and portion in the kingdom of God is conditioned upon yielding to the Holy Spirit's work in transforming us into the image of Jesus. (Rom. 8:29-30) He does the work and we merely cooperate instead of striving against Him. Jesus taught us in the parables of the minas and talents that we must be obedient and faithful to use the gifts He gives us for His glory in order to receive a reward from Him. (Luke 19:11-27, Matt. 25:14-30, 1Cor. 12:4-11)

Remember that the 8th chapter of Romans also teaches that we MUST have His Spirit if we truly ARE His, and that those who have Him dwelling in them DO submit to God and walk in the spirit, and that we must suffer with Him IF we are to glory with Him. We need to pay attention to all of it, not just the fluffy parts that make us feel reassured that God still loves us no matter what. (2Tim. 3:12-13, 1John 3) The man in the parable Jesus told about the wedding banquet who did not put on the wedding garment that had been PROVIDED accepted the invitation. He "showed up," but He had not "put on Christ" - similar to those who thought that having some sort of vague connection to

Jesus saved them, but they were not allowed in. (Matt. 22:1-14, Luke 13:22-30, Rom. 13:14, Gal. 3:26-27)

We should be looking forward to His return with great anticipation because we are READY. We are walking in the LIGHT, fully CLOTHED, with nothing to be ashamed of. (2Cor. 5:1-5, 2Tim. 4:6-8, Rom. 8:16-25, 1Cor. 9:24-27, Col. 3:23-25, 1John 2:27-29, Matt. 25:1-13, 1Thess. 5:4-10) We have examined ourselves as Paul told us to do and we are confident that we will receive our inheritance. (2Cor. 13:5, Gal. 5:16-25, 2 Pet. 1:3-12, Rev. 2-3, Eph. 1:11-14, Heb. 10:32-36, Heb. 3:5-17) If we do not bother to examine ourselves, or we do and find ourselves lacking but are not willing to change our ways, then that is cause for concern. We must accept discipline from God and encourage one another to live up to our high calling. (1Cor. 11:30-32, Heb. 12:3-11, Phil. 3:13-21, Col. 2-3, Eph. 4, 1Thess. 2:11-12, 2Thess. 1, Rev. 3:19, 2Cor. 13:11, Titus 2, Heb. 10:23-25)

If we are on the earth when these things written in Rev. 13 come to pass, God will not "understand" that even though He did NOT cast a delusion over us, we wanted to save our physical lives by taking the mark—knowing that it is idolatry because it is putting trust in and ascribing worship to a false god, knowing that those around us who are deceived do not have their names written in the Book of Life. **Anyone who does so will be officially born of Satan, not God**. That is why it's called the hour of trial. It is a TEST. (Dan. 7:21-22, 25, Isa. 48:10, Jam. 1:2-4, Jam. 1:12-16, 1Pet. 1:6-7) That is why it calls for such endurance. What will we choose—to lose our lives in order to gain our souls, or to survive? This is why Jesus said those very harsh words in Luke 21:19, Matt. 16:25-26, Mark 8:35-38, Luke 9:24-26 and John 12:25, but especially:

*"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. **Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.** For I have come to turn " 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.** Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous*

person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." Matthew 10:32-42

Why do you suppose the person who gives a cup of water to someone because they are a prophet receive the same reward as the prophet himself? In my opinion, it's because in the ultimate fulfillment of those words, it may cost a person's LIFE—not only to refuse the mark, but also to support those who refuse to take the mark. Dangerous times. We have a type of it in the Old Testament when Saul was pursuing David. Saul found out that some priests had sheltered and assisted David, so he had them, their families and even their livestock killed! (1 Sam. 22)

*Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. **For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.** Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, **let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* Hebrews 4:11-16

The "sword" that Jesus referred to in Matt. 10:34 above (as bringing instead of peace) is the same one that divides soul and spirit—the word of God. (John 12:48) Later in this article, we see that He also kindles a fire, in addition to clearing His threshing floor. (Matt. 3:12) Jesus is not our "buddy", He is our Lord and the King of ALL—and He loves us enough to lay down His life for us. What could He possibly ask of us that would be "too much"? He doesn't even ask us to do ANYTHING of our own power. (Eph. 3:14-21, Eph. 6:10-20, Col. 1:9-23, 2Thess. 2:11-12, 2Pet. 1:3-12)

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. **Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And**

after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:6-11

Let's look in more detail at the information contained in Revelation 13 about this mark of the beast. What is it and its effect? When does this occur? Who causes it and who does it affect? Where does this happen? Why? For how long? What must believers alive on earth at this time do?

*And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And **they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast**, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for **forty-two months**. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it **over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.** If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. Then I saw **another beast** rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It **exercises all the authority of the first beast** in its presence, and **makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast**, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. **Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or***

the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. Revelation 13:1-18

What is it and its effect? It is the number (666) or name of the beast on the right hand or forehead, and it is required in order to buy and sell. Who causes it, and who does it affect? The dragon (Satan) who gives his authority to the first beast, both demanding worship, and a second beast who appears to enforce it. Where? On earth, affecting the world. Why? Satan has always wanted to be God (not "a god," but THE God.) He hates God and everyone who loves Him, and He is the "father of lies." (John 8:44, 1John 2:9-11, 1John 3:15, 1John 4:20) For how long? 42 months. (Also see Dan. 7:25) What must believers alive on earth at this time do? Endure. Refuse the mark and refuse to worship the beast, even if it costs our lives. Fear God, not men. (Matt. 10:28, Gal. 1:10, Prov. 3:5-8) Lose our lives to gain them. (Matt. 10:32-42) (Also see the passage at the top of the article.)

To find out when, as well as some additional information about why and who, we can look at Revelation 12:

*And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. **And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.** And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have **conquered** him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. **Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who***

dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!
 *And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and **went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.** And he stood on the sand of the sea. Revelation 12:1-17*

So this occurs after Satan is cast out of heaven once and for all. He knows that "his time is short" before Jesus will return to put a stop to his reign of terror. This was prophesied in Isa. 14:12-21, Ezek. 28:11-19 (which are dual prophecies about a historical king AND Satan). Satan "fell" spiritually before he tempted Eve, but he still had access to heaven at least up until the time Jesus ascended to His Father. (We know this because of the pre-enactment with Joshua "standing in" for Jesus in the vision where his robes are filthy and Satan accuses him in Zech. 3, 2Cor. 5:21, John 20:17.) Many believe that Satan was banned from heaven shortly after creation, but notice that reference is made to terrorizing the nations. There were not any nations yet when only Adam and Eve had been created. Additionally, Satan was able to accuse Job, just as we see he does with all of the saints in the passage above. We know that God tolerates "vessels of wrath" for as long as He sees fit, for His own purposes. (Rom. 9:14-22) If we cleanse ourselves from the dishonorable, we will be vessels fit for honorable use by the Master of the House. (2Tim. 2:19-26, 2Cor. 6:14-18)

We know Jesus said that this will be the greatest tribulation ever experienced and ever to BE experienced by the whole world, followed by His return to reign on earth, when He will judge the survivors among the nations. (Matt. 24:21-27, Matt. 25:31-46, Joel 2:32) Prior to His return, He will take the great power He received from His Father (Matt. 28:18, Dan. 7:13-14, John 20:17) and begin reigning in earnest, with a rod of iron, rewarding His own servants and destroying those on earth who rose up against Him. (Rev. 11:15-19, Dan. 7:9-10, Rev. 20:4, Matt. 19:28-30, Dan. 7:26-27, Heb. 2:8, Luke 19:27, Isa. 66:15-16, Rev. 14:17-20, Isa. 63:2-6, Rev. 19:11-21, Joel 3:11-17)

So we know these things have not happened yet. We can also learn from the passages that the time of tribulation (although referred to as "the time of Jacob's trouble" - Jer. 30:4-11) affects all "those who" dwell on earth. "Those who" dwell in heaven have already conquered Satan with their testimony. (Rev. 12:9-12) They didn't love their lives even unto death, which indicates severe persecution, but yet the hour of trial has not yet begun. In other words, these match the description of the Church of Philadelphia, who "tested out" of the hour of trial.

*"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon **all who dwell on the face of the whole earth**. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have **strength to escape** all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:34-36*

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. 5:1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.** For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11*

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was

*pregnant and was crying out in **birth pains and the agony of giving birth.** And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. Revelation 12:1-6*

*"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet **you have kept my word and have not denied my name.** Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. **Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.** I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one **who conquers**, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Revelation 3:7-13*

I personally am not sure about the exact timing of the group in Rev. 7:9-17. They do fit the description in Rev. 19:7-8, Rev. 21:4 and Rev. 22:14. They have washed their robes and also have definitely SUFFERED for the sake of Jesus and WILL reign with Him in the millennium. The group that seems to fit the description of the church of Philadelphia is in Rev. 14:1-5, which appears to occur before the hour of trial (since the angel warned about it afterwards). They have names written on them and are on Mt. Zion (representing the temple - Heb. 12:22) like in Rev. 3:12. They are firstfruits (Rom. 8:23, 2Thess. 2:13, Jam. 1:18) and follow Jesus. (John 10:16) Like Jesus, they are spotless and blameless (2Pet. 3:11-18, Isa. 53:7, Zeph. 3:11-13, Eph. 5:25-27, John 13:3-10, John 15:3) So it would appear that perhaps they are the wise virgins, who were KNOWN by Him, because they are ONE with Him. (John 17, Luke 20:34-36, 1Cor. 6:17, Rom. 8:9)

But my point in this article isn't to pinpoint when the rapture occurs. I am aware of the various viewpoints, including John's being told to "come up here" in Rev. 4:1-2, as well as the "man child" caught up to the throne in Rev. 12:5 (who fits the description not only of Jesus, but also of the Church of Thyatira in Rev. 2:18-29; we are told that the goal is that we reach the state of being a "mature man" in Christ in Eph. 4:13). It's enough to know that believers do not suffer GOD'S wrath, and those who are "called, chosen AND faithful" return WITH Him (and only they among believers do). (Rev. 17:14, Zech. 14:3, Psa. 110, esp. v. 3, Jude 1:14-15, Deut. 33:3 - the term "holy ones" is not *restricted* to angels.)

Have you ever tried to read the Bible without the section headings, paragraph breaks and chapter breaks? If you do, it will often become apparent that things are related that have been separated by editors. Potentially, one such passage is Matt. 16:24-17:20. Jesus discusses how He will return to reward those who took up their crosses and followed Him, ending that discussion with "some present will not see death" (which brings to mind 1Cor. 15:51). Right after that is the transfiguration (which only SOME of His disciples are present for - John 6:70, John 15:16). And what are the remaining disciples doing when they return from the MOUNTAIN (like Mt. Zion in Rev. 14:1)? They are unsuccessfully battling a demon! (Dan. 7:21-22)

Those who claim that NO ONE escapes the hour of trial/reign of the beast (despite Jesus' words to the contrary) and those who say EVERYONE who claims to believe escapes (despite "having no oil in their lamps") are equally wrong. Jesus returns WITH His called, chosen and faithful (they have all three of these qualities) at the seventh bowl of wrath. His people have been "those who dwell in heaven" during the wrath, cursed by Satan during the hour of trial (Rev. 13:6, the Church is a temple built of living stones - 1Pet. 2)-those who were unable to enter the temple during the bowls of wrath. (Rev. 15:7-8)

Another side note: For some reason many Bible translators have replaced the Greek word "and" with "then" or "now", and "after these things" with "after this." For myself, I would rather they stick with what it says, as you lose the plural version of "things" when you say "this", and you add an element of consecutive time that may not have been intended when you say "then" or "now" instead of "and." Some of these things John the Beloved is shown take place on earth and some in heaven; some occur concurrently and he is only shown one at a time. I think that the substitution of "insignificant" words has caused much confusion.

*And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "**Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.**" And I saw the woman, **drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.** When I saw her, I marveled greatly. But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. **And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.** This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings **for one hour**, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. **They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.**" Revelation 17:1-14*

*And I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. **Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The***

one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. **And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. **He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.** Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. Revelation 19:6-21

Below, we know that the advice in this next passage applies to the servants waiting for their Lord and Master to return **from** a wedding (the Greek word for wedding is the same for both the ceremony and the subsequent feast - marriage - Heb. 13:4, Rev. 19:7) because of the passage following it below. These servants of God who are being judged could not have taken the mark of the beast (which is an "automatic fail"). It matters whether they "knew better" or not to do right; and it's one thing to "not get ready," and another for a servant in charge to "beat his fellow servants."

*After these things I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and **no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.*** Revelation 15:5-8

Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by. For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain. Isaiah 26:20-21

("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. **The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"** And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered **Babylon the great**, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe. Revelation 16:15-21

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until **the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly**. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. **But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.** 2 Peter 3:1-10

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return **from a wedding**, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. **You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**" Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? **It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.** But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him apart and assign him a place with the unbelievers. **The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"** Luke 12:35-49

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And **he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.** Revelation 20:1-3

"I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the **beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.** As for the rest of the beasts, their **dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.**" Daniel 7:11-12

In our brief study of end time events, this brings us to the beginning of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ, followed by the second resurrection, judgment, death and hades being thrown into the lake of fire along with everyone whose name is not in the Book of Life, and then the eternal kingdom. (Zech. 8, Isa. 2, Isa. 11, Isa. 30:26, Isa. 60, Isa. 65-66, Zech. 14, Micah 3-4, Rev. 20:7-22:5)

How amazing it is that God tells us all these things in advance! (Matt. 24:25) **I would be extremely relieved if Mr. MacArthur would very publicly retract his poorly-thought-out teaching, which reverses the warnings God was so gracious to provide.** No harm has been done yet as these things have not yet come to pass. There is still time for him to abandon his harmful hypothesis and adhere strictly to the word of God so that there will be no blood on his hands. (Ezek. 3:17-21, loosely applied) The Bible does not teach that we can take the mark of the beast, repent of it and be saved. God gave us SEVERE warnings against this, and we are not to "soften" it for anyone, negating what He said. That is going beyond the text, and it is the sort of thing people do when they want to change what God said to allow various sins that people they love commit (or that they like to do themselves). The result is people being deceived into thinking that their sin is acceptable to God. (Jer. 23:16-22, Gal. 6:7-9, 2Pet. 2:18-22)

I feel I need to refute a common false teaching: The "mark" is NOT Sunday worship. Jesus Himself is our Sabbath rest. The works that we must rest from are the same ones that He is resting from—the finished work of salvation. (Heb. 4, Heb. 1:1-4, Heb. 10, John 19:30) Our whole lives are His now that He has redeemed us, and He is our everything, forever. (1Cor. 6:18-20, Rom. 12:1-2)

Take a look at the severe consequences for idolatry in the following passage. Remember, this applies to people belonging to the one, true God, who KNEW to worship ONLY Him.

Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. ***The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in***

accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law. Deuteronomy 29:18-21

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? 1 Corinthians 10:21-22

The one **who conquers** will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will **never blot his name out of the book of life**. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. Revelation 3:5

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. Revelation 22:18-19

There is a price to pay for ANY form of idolatry. Notice that the "root of bitterness" in Deut. 29:18 is mentioned again in Heb. 12:15 below. We have ONE God who does not change. He STILL hates the same things today as He has always hated. Taking the mark (which I believe will be permanent—those who have it—or at least do not have God's seal—at one point wish to die and are unable to do so over a 5-month period of time - Rev. 9:1-11) and worshiping the beast (remember, whoever refuses may be killed - Rev. 13:15) is quite an obvious practice of idolatry. (1Cor. 10:14, 1Cor. 5:11, Eph. 5:5) We are also warned to be careful not to forsake our inheritance as firstborn sons of God, which we can do by treating our fleshly passions as "our god" instead of valuing the treasure that is being kept for us in heaven. Even unrepentant covetousness is considered idolatry. (Eph. 5:5) This world and its pleasures are passing away, but the one who does the will of God will remain forever. (Matt. 6:19-34, 1John 2:15-17, Phil. 3:17-20, Rev. 3:19)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. **Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses

you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." **It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.** For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.** Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But **you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.** See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. **Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.** Hebrews 12:1-29

It has been very saddening to see how "fans" of John MacArthur make light of this error. We are not to be respecters of persons, but are to lovingly correct one another. (James 2:1, James 3:17, 1Tim. 5:21, 2Tim.4:2) Regardless of what anyone else says, here is the message that needs to be conveyed clearly, directly from the Bible (remember, the Book of Revelation was given by Jesus through His angel directly to John - Rev. 1:1-3):

"If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Revelation 14:9-12

Note: Rev. 13:6 specifies the right hand, which seems to signify strength and authority in its usage in the Bible. Also, when Aaron and his sons were ordained as priests in Lev. 8:22-24, the ritual specified by God involved their right side.

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