



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 20

Text: Rev. 7:1-8
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2. What the text means.

Sealing of the People of God

Greek NT

7.1 Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς, κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς ἵνα μὴ πνέῃ ἄνεμος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς μήτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μήτε ἐπὶ πᾶν δένδρον. 2 Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἀναβαίνοντα ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου ἔχοντα σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλη τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἀγγέλοις οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν 3 λέγων· μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν.

4 Καὶ ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἐσφραγισμένων, ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, ἐσφραγισμένοι ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς υἰῶν Ἰσραήλ·

5 ἐκ φυλῆς Ἰουδα δώδεκα χιλιάδες ἐσφραγισμένοι, ἐκ φυλῆς Ῥουβὴν δώδεκα χιλιάδες, ἐκ φυλῆς Γὰδ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

6 ἐκ φυλῆς Ἀσὴρ δώδεκα χιλιάδες, ἐκ φυλῆς Νεφθαλὶμ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

Gute Nachricht Bibel

7.1 Danach sah ich an den vier Enden der Erde vier Engel* stehen. Sie hielten die vier Winde zurück, damit kein Wind auf der Erde, auf dem Meer und in den Bäumen wehte. 2 Von dorthen, wo die Sonne aufgeht, sah ich einen anderen Engel emporsteigen, er hatte das Siegel des lebendigen Gottes in der Hand. Mit lauter Stimme wandte er sich an die vier Engel, denen Gott die Macht gegeben hatte, dem Land und dem Meer Schaden zuzufügen, 3 und sagte: »Verwüstet weder das Land noch das Meer noch die Bäume! Erst müssen wir die Diener und Dienerinnen unseres Gottes mit dem Siegel auf der Stirn kennzeichnen.«

4 Und ich hörte, wie viele mit dem Siegel gekennzeichnet wurden. Es waren hundertvierundvierzigtausend aus allen Stämmen des Volkes Israel:

5 zwölftausend vom Stamm Juda, zwölftausend vom Stamm Ruben, zwölftausend vom Stamm Gad,

6 zwölftausend vom Stamm Ascher, zwölftausend vom Stamm Naftali,

NRSV

7.1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any leaf rustled in the trees, and the sea became as smooth as glass. 2 I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, 3 saying, "Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads."

4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel:

5 From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,

6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve

NLT

7.1 Then I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds from blowing upon the earth. Not a leaf rustled in the trees, and the sea became as smooth as glass. 2 And I saw another angel coming from the east, carrying the seal of the living God. And he shouted out to those four angels who had been given power to injure land and sea, 3 "Wait! Don't hurt the land or the sea or the trees until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants."

4 And I heard how many were marked with the seal of God. There were 144,000 who were sealed from all the tribes of Israel:

5 from Judah - 12,000 from Reuben - 12,000 from Gad - 12,000 6 from Asher - 12,000 from Naphtali - 12,000 from Manasseh - 12,000

7 from Simeon - 12,000 from Levi - 12,000 from Issachar - 12,000 8 from Zebulun - 12,000 from Joseph - 12,000 from Benjamin - 12,000

	ἐκ φυλῆς Μανασσή δῶδεκα χιλιάδες,	zwölftausend vom Stamm Manasse,	7	from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,
7	ἐκ φυλῆς Συμεών δῶδεκα χιλιάδες, ἐκ φυλῆς Λευὶ δῶδεκα χιλιάδες, ἐκ φυλῆς Ἴσσαχάρ δῶδεκα χιλιάδες,	7 zwölftausend vom Stamm Simeon, zwölftausend vom Stamm Levi, zwölftausend vom Stamm Issachar,		from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,
8	ἐκ φυλῆς Ζαβουλών δῶδεκα χιλιάδες, ἐκ φυλῆς Ἰωσήφ δῶδεκα χιλιάδες, ἐκ φυλῆς Βενιαμὶν δῶδεκα χιλιάδες ἐσφραγισμένοι.	8 zwölftausend vom Stamm Sebulon, zwölftausend vom Stamm Josef, zwölftausend vom Stamm Benjamin. ...und die unzählbar große Schar der schon Vollendeten im Himmel	8	from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand sealed.



INTRODUCTION

Between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals located in the heavenly scroll of God's will for His creation, there comes a sealing activity (σφραγίσωμεν, v. 3; ἐσφραγισμένων, v. 4) with σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος, [a seal of the living God](#) (v. 2), connected first to the 144,000 and then to a multitude of people. These are referred to as τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, [the servants of our God](#) (v. 3). The first of these two groups of people is located on earth, while the second group is located in Heaven before the throne.

This action was to occur prior to the pouring out of divine wrath upon the earth, so to the people of God would be marked as bound to Heaven upon their martyrdom. In this so-called 'interlude' in chapter seven stands as a further signaling of the care of God for His people that was developed with the fifth and sixth seals being untied to expose the further contents of the heavenly scroll.

When correctly understood, the passage stands as a powerful affirmation of the depths of God's compassion and concern for His people. But we must not overlook the apocalyptic visionary nature of this picture. And this will defy attaching sequential logic, especially of a temporal nature, to the actions and events in the picture contained in this chapter. Yet there is a message that we all need greatly to hear found in this chapter.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Careful consideration of these background aspects comes first before we closely examine the text itself.

Historical Aspects:

As is always the case, attention needs to be given to the composition and hand copying of the passage as the heart of the External History, and then the time

and place markers inside the text that allude to events etc. taking place on earth. Since this passage is a part of an apocalyptic visionary genre, the perspective in it has risen above history in either the modern or ancient definitions. As a consequence, the Internal History can only focus on earth bound indicators that serve as the vehicle for communicating the message of the passage to earth bound readers.

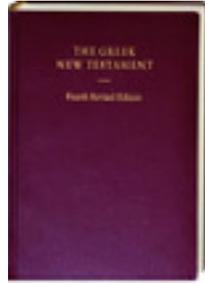
External History. The *compositional history* for the entire document was treated in depth in the first study of this series. Thus only a brief summation will be given here. The written document was produced by the apostle John while on the Island of Patmos sometime in the middle 90s of the first Christian century. It was written by divine direction to the members of seven Christian communities located in the Roman province of Asia. The nature of the document is that of an apocalypse, which was an exclusively ancient Jewish and early Christian form of writing not found anywhere else in the world of ancient literature.

The transmission history of this text centers on the process of hand copying the passage technically until the emergence of the printing press in the fifteenth century. Functionally, however, because the copying of the Greek text of the NT came to a virtual stand still by the ninth century, the focus then is on the second through the ninth centuries. Two modern printed editions of the Greek New Testament are used for convenience in this analysis because both contain a Text Apparatus through which the reader can quicken and much more easily obtain access to approximately the six thousand texts of the Greek text and the numerous ancient translations of the original Greek text that play a role in the analysis and comparison of these text copies.¹ The goal of such analysis is to establish the most

¹ The process of comparing and evaluating these manuscripts comes under the label of Textual Criticism. For a detailed
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likely original wording of the NT text, which then serves as the basis for the exegeting of the text in order to understand its meaning.

The first one of the printed Greek New Testaments is *The Greek New Testament* in the 4th revised edition and published by the United Bible Societies. The Text Apparatus contained in it limits the references to variations in wordings etc. in which the editors felt would impact the translation of the NT text. Fortunately for Rev. 7:1-8 no variation is listed.



But, of course, this does not mean that there are no places where this large number of existing ancient manuscripts for these verses are found. This is where the Text Apparatus for the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) comes in handy. It contains reference to virtually all the variations in the known manuscripts through a system of abbreviations.



In this printed Greek New Testament some eighteen places are listed in the Text Apparatus where variations of wording surface in the ancient manuscripts.² explanation see my “[Study in Textual Criticism](#),” which I used with fourth semester Greek students in order to introduce them to the basics of this discipline.

²Offenbarung 7,1

* και (sy^{h**}) μ. τ. (ταυτα M^A sy^h) & M sy; Bea (Μετὰ τοῦτο is replaced with και)

| txt A C 1006. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2351 pc latt sy^{hmg}

* πνευση & 1841. 1854. 2344 pc (πνέη is replaced with either πνεύση or γενήται)

| γενηται 2329

* ο C 1611. 2329. 2344. 2351 al (ὁ is inserted before ἄνεμος)

* A (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς is omitted)

* τι δενδ. C 046. 1006. 1841. 2053. 2351 M^K sa (πῦν δένδρον is replaced by one of the following)

| -δρου A (2329 pc)

| -δρων 1611 (syh) bo

| txt & 1854. 2344 M^A sy^{ph}

Offenbarung 7,2

* -λων A pc sy (ἀνατολῆς is replaced with ἀνατολῶν)

* εκραζεν A P 2053 (ἔκραξεν is replaced with ἐκέκραξε)

| εκεκραξε Or

* 1854. 2329 pc (αὐτοῖς is omitted)

Offenbarung 7,3

* και A 2351 pc (μήτε is replaced either with και or μηδέ)

| μηδε & 1854

* μηδε & 1854. 2329 pc (μήτε is replaced with μηδέ)

*¹ αχρις οὐ 1611. 1854. 2329. 2351 M^K (ἄχρι is replaced either with ἄχρι οὐ or ἄχρι ἄν)

| αχ. αν 2344

Offenbarung 7,4

* A (Καὶ ἦκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἐσφραγισμένων is omitted)

* και C 1006. 1841 M^K (καὶ is inserted before τεσσαράκοντα)

* -νων 2351 M^K (ἐσφραγισμένοι is replaced with

Again as we have typically noticed in previous studies, the variations reflect either efforts at stylistic improvement or careless copying. None of the alternative wording significantly changes the meaning of the passage.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of 7:1-8 in the full confidence that it represents the original wording of the text.

Internal History. The primary background issue to emerge from vv. 1-8 concerns the meaning of both σφραγίς, seal, and σφραγίζω, I seal, along with the related κατασφραγίζω, I seal up (cf. 5:1).³ These are closely connected to signum and sigillum in the Latin.⁴ The noun σφραγίς is



ἐσφραγισμένων)

Offenbarung 7,5

* Δαν 1854 pc (Γὰδ is replaced with Γὰν)

Offenbarung 7,6

* Δαν bo (Μανασση is replaced with Γὰν)

Offenbarung 7,7

* & (ἐκ φυλῆς Συμεῶν δώδεκα χιλιάδες is omitted)

Offenbarung 7,8

* -μενων 1854 pc (ἐσφραγισμένοι is replaced with one of these alternative spellings)

| -μεναι M^K

| - 2329 pc vg^{ms}; Prim

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 645.]

³The noun σφραγίς can refer either to the instrument such as a signet ring that was used to make a stamp or seal, or to the impression or mark made by the sealing instrument.

Using seals is an ancient custom in antiquity. They serve to identify things with a sign, figure, letter, or words, or a combination of these. A technical element is presupposed, namely, the making of an instrument by means of which the desired mark can be impressed or copied once or often on a suitable surface, thus producing the stamp or seal. Like σφραγίς and sigillum (from signum) “seal” has two meanings. It can denote the instrument, the signet or ring (σακτύλιον, anulus). It can also denote the impression made by this. [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 7:939.]

⁴“The terms σφραγίς and σφραγίζεῖν refer to the impression of a seal in clay or wax; since seals could be attached to people, they can be confused with tattoos or brands. The term σφραγίς refers both to the seal and to the impression made by it; the term also represents the power and authority of its owner. The instruments used in sealing (e.g., cylinders, rings), often made of precious stones, were important as symbols of power. Individuals, temples, and cities frequently had seals. This is even more true of the gods, for Orphica Hymni 34.26 says of Apollo, ‘you have the master seal [σφραγίδα] of the cosmos.’ Seals in wax or clay were attached to many types of objects to guarantee their authenticity (e.g., weights and measures). The mode of sealing is of interest particularly when

used 15 times inside the NT with all but two instances in the book of Revelation. Twice (7:2 & 9:4) the noun refers to a seal placed on the foreheads of people. Of the 13 NT uses of the verb σφραγίζω seven instances are found in Revelation. The action of ‘sealing people’ is referred to in Jhn. 6:27; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30, and in Revelation at 7:3, 4, 5, 8. The single use of κατασφραγίζω in the NT is found at Rev. 5:1, and refers to the heavenly scroll being sealed.

When these refer to securing things, such as writings in a scroll, the meaning is relatively easy and clear. But in chapter seven the seal and sealing actions are targeting people, rather than things.⁵ How does one σφραγίζει a person? The literal background referred to a brand, which also was called a στίγμα when it specified ownership, that was burned onto the body of a slave, often on the forehead where it was readily visible.⁶ This typically was a mark of ownership

it is used in connection with people. Seals could be worn suspended from a chain or cord worn around the neck (Xenophon Vect. 4.21). . . .

“Branding or tattooing was used in several different ways in the ancient world: (1) as a barbarian custom, (2) as a punishment or mark of disgrace among the Greeks and later the Romans, (3) as a mark of ownership in the Roman empire, (4) as a sacral rite in some cults, and (5) as a term for Christian baptism or for the rite following baptism that conveyed the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the OT tattooing (the technical term for which was קעקע *qa-āqa*.) was forbidden in Lev 19:28, translated in the LXX as γράμματα στυκτά, ‘tattooed writing.’ Yet an emancipated slave could receive a tattooed inscription (קעקע כתובה *kētōbet qa-āqa*.) according to b. Giṭ. 20b. Permissible and impermissible marks on the skin are discussed in m. Mak. 3:6 (tr. Danby, Mishnah):

If a man wrote [on his skin] pricked-in writing [he is culpable]. If he wrote but did not prick it in, or pricked it in but did not write it, he is not culpable, but only if he writes it and pricks it in with ink or eye-paint or aught that leaves a lasting mark. R. Simeon b. Judah says in the name of R. Simeon: He is not culpable unless he writes there the name [of a god], for it is written, “Nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 457.]

⁵A related text is **Gal 6:17**.

Τοῦ λοιποῦ κόπους μοι μηδεὶς παρεχέτω· ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου βαστάζω.

From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.

Here Paul refers to the scars from the various whippings as στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, i.e., the brands identifying him with Jesus. The idiom βαστάζω στίγματα alluded to slaves wearing the brands of their owners.

⁶“Tattooing could also be a mark of ownership (Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 191–94). The practice of branding cattle or sheep with the name of the owner was as common in antiquity as it is in modern times. Documentary evidence from the Egyptian Jewish colony at Elephantine indicates that slaves were marked on the arm with Aramaic letters (A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, 28.2). Pss. Sol. 2:6 speaks of the Jewish experience during the exile: ‘The sons and daughters (were) in harsh captivity, their neck in a seal, a spectacle among the Gentiles.’” [David E. Aune, *Reve-*

of the slave.⁷ The [branding of slaves](#) in the Roman empire took on a variety of meanings. When a slave was branded generally, it was a mark of ownership to specify who owned him or her. But additionally, further branding took place to signify a runaway slave that had been captured and was a sign of punishment with the letter F burned into his forehead.⁸ Convicts headed to the gladiatorial shows were branded to identify their fate in the arena.

One very curious and fascinating pattern that emerged in second century Christianity was the linking of both σφραγίς, *seal*, and σφραγίζω, *I seal*, to βάπτισμα, *baptism*, and βαπτίζω, *I baptize*.⁹ Thus σφραγίζω equals

lotion 6–16, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 458.]

⁷Under emperor Constantine I (306 - 337 AD) the branding of slaves on their forehead was banned and it was done on the hand, arm or calf of the leg.

⁸“The Greeks used tattoos primarily as a punishment for slaves and criminals, a custom they apparently learned from the Persians, and hence it was a mark of disgrace (Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 190–91). Disobedient or runaway slaves were sometimes branded or tattooed on their foreheads (Gustafson, CA 16 [1977] 81–85). In Petronius Satyricon 103, Eumolpus thinks that the head and eyebrows of Encolpius should be shaved: ‘Then I will come and mark your foreheads [*frontes*] with some neat inscription so that you look like slaves punished by branding’ (LCL tr.). Then in Satyricon 105, ‘Tryphaena, thinking that the marks on our foreheads were real prisoners’ brands [*vera enim stigmata credebatur captivorum frontibus* (n.b. that *frons* can mean either face or forehead) impressa], cried bitterly over our supposed punishment.’ Herodas 5.65–67, 77–79 also refers to having a slave tattooed on the forehead: ‘when he has this inscription on his forehead [ἐν τῷ μετώπῳ τὸ ἐπίγραμμα] ἔχων τοῦτο.’ C. P. Jones argues that stigma almost always refers to tattooing and not branding (JRS 77 [1987] 140). Lucian Nigrinus 27, at his satirical best, refers to philosophers who train students to endure cold baths and whipping, ‘while the more humane mark their skins with iron’ (tr. Jones, JRS 77 [1987] 142). Among the ancients, tattooing was nearly always a sign of punishment and degradation (i.e., a lowering of status since it was normally reserved for slaves), so ancient medical literature frequently deals with the problem of removing tattoos (Jones, JRS 77 [1987] 143). Delinquent slaves were often tattooed (Aristophanes Birds 760–61; Frogs 1508–14; Menander Samia 321–24; Petronius Sat. 103.2; Suetonius Caligula 27.3; Diogenes Laertius 4.46). Slaves were tattooed on their foreheads, on the entire face, and sometimes on parts of the body such as the arm, hand, or leg. The tattoos could consist of texts, perhaps mentioning the crime committed; see Plato Leges 9.854D (LCL tr.), ‘Whosoever is caught robbing a temple, if he be a foreigner or a slave, his curse shall be branded on his forehead and on his hands.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 457–458.]

⁹“The rite of baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit are not necessarily identical in earliest Christianity. The ritual that accomplished the postbaptismal bestowal of the Spirit on those who had received baptism was designated in several ways: (a) ‘laying on of hands’ (Acts 8:17ff.; 19:6; see Heb 6:2), (b) ‘anointing’ (2 Cor 1:21–22; 1 John 2:20, 27), and (c) ‘sealing’ (2 Cor 1:21–22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Testim. Truth 69.10–11); see Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 259–65. In this metaphorical use of seal-

βαπτίζω etc. Although this seems to be a new meaning for σφραγίς and σφραγίζω by the middle of the second century, the arguments for projecting this definitional link to the apostolic era rest on very shaky grounds and are unconvincing. Thus the assertion that the ‘sealing’ in Revelation seven refer to the water baptism of these believers in their conversion is exceedingly questionable.

The issue of the precise meaning of the sealing action in 7:3 will be discussed below in the exegesis of the passage. But in the background that would have provided the backdrop for attributing meaning to the

ing in 2 Cor 1:21–22, it is God who does the sealing (θεός, ὁ καὶ σφραγισάμενος ἡμᾶς, ‘God, who also seals us’). There are at least two ways of understanding the metaphor of sealing in this passage: (a) as a mark of ownership or (b) as confirmation of something with a seal (Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 265–66). Paul also referred to circumcision as a sealing (Rom 4:11), a metaphor that was probably already in use in Judaism (see Aramaic Levi 2; J. C. Greenfield and M. E. Stone, “Remarks on the Aramaic Testament of Levi,” RB 86 [1979] 218). Dunn (Romans 1:209) thinks it may have been current in Judaism, but he can point to no text earlier than Paul. Believers are therefore sealed by God and are his property (Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 265).

“Beginning in the second century, the ‘sealing’ (σφραγίς and σφραγίζεῖν) that Christians receive at baptism becomes a term for baptism. According to Heitmüller, the earliest clear designations of baptism with the term σφραγίς are Hermas Sim. 8.6.3; 9.16.2ff.; 9.17.4; 2 Clem. 7:6; 8:6 (‘Σφραγίς,’ 40). The texts are probably more ambiguous, however, for while σφραγίς in 2 Clem. 7:6; 8:6 can be understood as referring to the seal of baptism (Dinkler, *Signum Crucis*, 109; Donfried, *Clement*, 125), it can also be used primarily to refer to a mark of ownership (as in Rev 7:2–8), closely linked to baptism as the means whereby the seal is conferred (Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 390). The possibility of breaking the seal and receiving the seal anew is broached in Hermas Sim. 8.6.3. The seal is clearly identified with baptism in Hermas Sim. 9.16.4: ἡ σφραγίς τὸ ὕδωρ ἐστίν, ‘the seal is the water.’ This sealing is also explained as ‘bearing the name of the Son of God’ (Hermas Sim. 9.16.3). While Hermas readers apparently understood ‘water’ as ‘baptism,’ the fact that he must explain that ‘the seal is the water’ means that this use of the term ‘seal’ is novel (Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 391). He proposes that ‘sealing’ in the sense of ownership (from Rev 7:2–8) and ‘sealing’ in the Pauline sense of a sealing with the Holy Spirit combined to become the ‘sealing’ at baptism.

“Heitmüller, to be sure, was convinced that σφραγίς in Rev 7 was used of baptism and finds confirmation for this view particularly in the fact that the 144,000 when mentioned in Rev 14:1 bear the name of the Lamb and the Father on their foreheads (“Σφραγίς,” 59). At any rate, this new meaning of seal = baptism first appears in Asia Minor and Syria (Acts Thom. 26–27, 49–50, 87, 120, 131; Clement of Alexandria Exc. ex Theod. 80.3, 83; Odes Sol. 39.6–7; Acts Pet. 5; Acts Paul 25 [Pap. Heid., p. 28]; Mart. Paul 5; Irenaeus Dem. 3; see Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 391–95). Baptism can be construed as a ‘sealing’ since it involves an appeal to the name of Christ (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Hermas Sim. 8.6; 2 Clem. 7:6; 8:6). In Marcion, baptismal ritual included a bath, anointing, and sealing (Tertullian Adv. Marc. 1.14.3; 1.28.3).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 458–459.]

action of sealing here stands the practice of branding slaves in the first century Greco-Roman world.

Literary Aspects:

These aspects need to be treated especially where the details may be different from the scripture text in previous studies.

Genre: Of course, at the broad literary pattern we are seeing here a continuation of the apocalyptic vision of John.

But at the detailed level three patterns emerge clearly, with the first two being created by John and used repeatedly inside Revelation, and the third form having a wider usage in the ancient world.¹⁰

The angelic action, 7:1. Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς, κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς ἵνα μὴ πνέῃ ἄνεμος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς μήτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μήτε ἐπὶ πᾶν δένδρον. *After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree.*

David Aune provides a helpful analysis:¹¹

The first form, the angelic action, occurs four times and exhibits the following structural features (7:1; 8:2; 15:1; 20:1–3): **(1)** introductory phrase: καὶ εἶδον ἢ μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον (7:1; 8:2; 15:1), **(2)** object of vision: ἄγγελον ἢ ἀγγέλους (7:1; 8:2; 15:1; 20:1), **(3)** brief description of the action performed by or to the angel or angels (7:1; 8:2; 15:1; 20:1–3), and **(4)** an abrupt change of subject (7:2; 8:3; 15:2; 20:4). In addition, the author presents these brief angelophanies strictly as an observer; the angel or angels he sees and whose action he describes do not interact with him, and he does not interact with them.

In these instances John assumes a different posture in regard to describing the activities of angels. Normally they reside in heaven and may travel to earth in order to carry out missions.¹² But here they standing cosmologically over the earth, neither on it nor in heaven, i.e., ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς. The interpretive significance of this is not entirely certain but

¹⁰“This brief section [7:1–3] contains two literary forms that have few parallels in Jewish or Christian apocalyptic literature outside of Revelation. For this reason they can reasonably be regarded as literary forms created by the author, and they provide an important index for distinguishing between the author’s redaction of traditional material and sources and his own contributions to the composition of the text.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 434.]

¹¹David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 435.

¹²Out of the 66 uses of ἀγγελοῦς in Revelation, these four uses signal a different perspective of them by John.

some signals will emerge in the exegesis of the passage.

The angelic speech, 7:2-3. 2 Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἀναβαίνοντα ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου ἔχοντα σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλη τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἀγγέλοις οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν 3 λέγων· μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν. 2 I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, 3 saying, “Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”

This second form with emphasis upon the speaking of angels is more common inside Revelation. Again, the analysis of Aune is helpful:¹³

The second form, the angelic speech, occurs nine times in Revelation (7:2–3; 10:1–7; 14:6–7, 8, 9–11, 14–16, 18–20; 18:1–3; 19:17–18) and is once inserted immediately following an angelic action (7:2–3). The angelic speech in Revelation exhibits the following structural features: **(1)** introductory phrase: καὶ εἶδον (7:2; 10:1; 14:6; 18:1; 19:17), **(2)** object of vision: ἄλλον ἄγγελον (7:2; 10:1; 14:6, 8, 9; 18:1; 19:17), **(3)** movement of the angel (ascend, descend, fly, emerge, follow) to the center of the action (7:2; 10:1; 14:6, 8, 9, 15, 18; 18:1; 19:17), **(4)** a statement that the angel “cries with a loud voice” (7:2; 10:3; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 18:2a; 19:17), and **(5)** a brief statement uttered by the angel (7:3; 10:3 [what he says is not mentioned; only “he cried with a loud voice as a lion roars”]; 14:7, 8, 9b–11, 15b, 18b; 18:2b–3; 19:17b–18). This brief statement is the focus of this literary form.

Interestingly, in Revelation angels seem to talk more than act. In these nine instances they talk to one another rather than to John or other individuals either in heaven or on earth.

In addition to these two distinct patterns a third mixed pattern surfaces in 14:14–16 and 14:17–20.¹⁴ In connection to this mixed pattern a striking parallel is found in [2 Apoc. Bar.](#) 6:4–6:

¹³David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 435.

¹⁴“A mixed form, the angelic speech and action, occurs twice (14:14–16, 17–20), though both occurrences constitute two episodes within the larger literary form 14:14–20. It consists of several elements: **(1)** introductory phrase: καὶ εἶδον (14:14), **(2)** object of vision: an angelic figure (14:14 [“one like a son of man”], 17), **(3)** description of the figure (14:14, 17), **(4)** introduction of a second angel (14:15a, 18a), **(5)** a command given by the second angel to the first (14:15b, 18b), and **(6)** the fulfillment of the command by the first angel (14:16, 19–20).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 435.]

(1) Introductory phrase:	And I saw, and behold
(2) Object of vision:	there were standing four angels at the four corners of the city,
(3) Description:	each of them with a burning torch in his hands.
(4) Introduction of second angel	And another angel came down from heaven and said to them,
(5) Command of second angel	“Hold your torches and do not light them before I say it to you. Because I was sent first to speak a word to the earth and then to deposit in it what the Lord, the Most High, has commanded me.”
(6) Fulfillment of command	[missing] ¹⁵

The origin of 2 Baruch at approximately the same time as Revelation or perhaps shortly afterwards points to a common viewpoint with influence from one upon the other, or possibly from a third common, unknown source. Second Baruch is focused on the wrath of God from a Jewish looking back perspective in connection to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD. This is interesting since the supposed author was the seventh century BC OT prophet Jeremiah’s secretary Baruch. Obviously the document was composed by someone else living about 800 years after Baruch. Interpretively, this similar pattern to 2 Baruch can assist in understanding the significance of these two literary patterns surfacing inside Revelation beginning with 7:1–3.

The Census List, 7:4–8. This third pattern does represent a true genre with extensive usage in both the OT and other Jewish writings of this era.¹⁶ Such lists in

¹⁵David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 435.

¹⁶“The census is a specific form of list that occurs with some frequency in the OT, where it is used for purposes of taxation (Exod 30:11–16; 2 Kgs 15:19–20), for labor conscription (2 Chr 2:17–18; cf. 1 Kgs 5:13–18), for determining the cultic duties and social structure of members of the tribe of Levi (Num 3:14–4:49), for determining Israelite descent (Ezra 2 and par. in Neh 7 and 1 Esdr 5), but most commonly as a means for determining military strength (Num 1:2–46, esp. vv 2–3; 26:1–56, esp. vv 1–2; 2 Sam 24:1–9 [and par. 2 Chr 21:1–6]; 2 Chr 27:1–24). This suggests that the census in Rev 7:4–8 is for military purposes, a possibility that is partially confirmed by the present literary context of this pericope since, according to Rev 14:3–4, the group of 144,000 consists exclusively of adult males who practice sexual abstinence, an ancient Israelite requirement for holy warriors (Bauckham, JSNT 42 Page 6

the OT tended to be census lists for taxation purposes, as well as for other social objectives. A frequent use of such a census was to determine potential military strength in preparation for war. This may be a part of the intent here since the parallel list in Rev. 14:3-4 is comprised only of adult males who practice sexual abstinence, which was an ancient requirement for holy warriors.

In the next study we will touch on the very unique pattern of 7:9-17 as a part of the typical apocalyptic throne scene that centers on the worship of God.

These unique patterns are going to both complicate and assist the interpretation of chapter seven in Revelation. The reoccurring patterns raise questions of conceptual connections, especially regarding sequence. Are the repetitive patterns looking at a single [1991] 104; id., Neot 22 [1988] 217). However, the absence of all military and holy war imagery from Rev 7:4-8 makes this suggestion doubtful. The author's insistence on an equal number (12,000) from each of twelve tribes indicates his interest in the eschatological restoration of the twelve-tribe nation of Israel (Luke 22:30; 24:21; Acts 1:6; see Geysler, NTS 28 [1982] 389). The eschatology of the late OT and early Jewish periods emphasized the hope of the restoration of Israel (Deut 30:3-5; Isa 11:11-16; 27:12-13; 49:5-6; 54:7-10; Jer 31:7-14; Ezek 37:15-23; Hos 11:10-11; Pss 106:47; 147:2; Bar 5:5-9; 2 Macc 2:7; Sir 36:11; Tob 13:13; 1 Enoch 57; 90:33; 4 Ezra 13:12-13, 39-47; 2 Apoc. Bar. 78:5-7; T. Jos. 19:4; Pss. Sol. 11:2-7; 17:26; Shemoneh Esreh 10; m. Sanh. 10:3; Matt 19:28). In m. Sanh. 10:3 the opinions that the ten tribes will not return and that they will return are juxtaposed. This motif of the restoration of Israel was transmuted in early Christianity into the gathering of the elect from the four winds at the Parousia (Mark 13:27 = Matt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:16-17; 2 Thess 2:1).

David E. Aune, Revelation 6-16, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 436.

event and perspective but from differing viewpoints? Are they looking a similar events taking place over a sequence of occurrence? As might be expected, considerable difference of option exists here.

Literary Setting: Again, the literary context of 7:1-8 is perhaps the easiest literary aspect to identify. Clearly 7:1-8 is part one of a two part 'interlude' between the sixth and seventh seal openings, with part two being 7:9-17. The close inner connection of these two images of the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude raise all kinds of connection issues, which will be addressed in the exegesis sections of both this lesson and the following one. Given the contextual role here, the question then arises regarding the connection of chapter seven to the later 'interlude' sections in 10:1-11:13 and 12:1-14:20.

Clearly 7:1-8 continues the part two of John's apocalyptic vision introduced in 4:1 and continuing to 22:5. The throne visions in chapters four and five set the stage, and the opening of the first six seals in chapter six are the initial segments of that vision. The opening of the seventh seal in 8:1 will complete the first series of sevens, and lay the foundation for the second series of the trumpets beginning in 8:2.

These contextual aspects must not be overlooked in the exegesis of the scripture passage in that they form parameters for determining meaning within the text itself.

Literary Structure: The English text block diagram below, that is based on a very literalistic translation of the underlying Greek text, highlights visually the internal connections of ideas inside the passage.

```

7.1      After this
212      I saw four angels
           standing
           on the four corners of the earth,
           holding back the four winds of the earth,
           so that no wind might blow
           on the earth
           nor on the sea
           nor on every tree.

7.2      And
213      I saw another angel
           ascending
           from the rising of the sun
           possessing the seal of the Living God,

           and
214      he cried out. . . to the four angels
           in a loud voice
           |
           | to whom was given to them |
           | /-----|
           | to harm the earth

```

|
|
saying:

and
the sea

Do not harm the earth
nor the sea
nor the trees
until we may seal the slaves of our God
upon their foreheads.

7.4 And

215 I heard the number

of those **sealed**
one hundred forty four thousand,
sealed
out of every tribe of the sons of Israel:

7.5

/-----|
out of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand **sealed**,
out of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand,

7.6

out of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,
out of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand,
out of the tribe of Naphtalie twelve thousand,

7.7

out of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,
out of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,
out of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand,

7.8

out of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,
out of the tribe of Zebulum twelve thousand,
out of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand,
out of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand **sealed**.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

Quite obviously from the above diagram the text naturally divides into two units of idea expression: statements 212 -214 with the appearance of two sets of angels, and 215 with the listing of the 144,000. John sees the two angels, but only hears the listing number called out. The appearance of the angels #212, four angels, and #s 213-214, one angel, provide the sub-division inside the first unit of expression. The second half of the passage in # 215 is distinct from the first unit, even though the common term σφραγίσωμεν / έσφραγισμένων establishes a minimal link.¹⁷

Exegesis of the Text:

Quite naturally in light of the above diagram the exegesis of the scripture text should revolve around the

¹⁷“The three textual units in the first scene in 7:1-8 are: (a) a vision of the four angels restraining the winds (7:1); (b) a vision of another angel with the seal of God, who tells the first four angels not to harm the earth, the sea, or the trees until the servants of God have been sealed (7:2-3); and (c) a census list of the number and tribal affiliation of those sealed, which is overheard (not seen) by John (vv 4-8). Noteworthy by its absence is a scene in which the actual sealing takes place. There seems to be a lacuna between 7:3 and 7:4, at least in terms of narrative logic. However, in Ezek 9:4-8 also, to which this passage probably alludes and after which it is modeled, the actual marking of Jews who are to be protected from slaughter is not narrated but simply mentioned.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 434.]

two natural divisions in the passage itself.

A. John sees angels, vv. 1-3

7.1 Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς, κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς ἵνα μὴ πνέῃ ἄνεμος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς μήτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μήτε ἐπὶ πᾶν δένδρον. 2 Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἀναβαίνοντα ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου ἔχοντα σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἀγγέλοις οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν 3 λέγων· μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν.

7.1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. 2 I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, 3 saying, “Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”

This segment is introduced with Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον, after this I saw. Note that the second half of chapter seven is introduced with the very similar Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, after these things I saw. Note the pattern in Revelation:

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ, 4:1a;

μετὰ ταῦτα, 4:1c;

Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον, 7:1

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ, 7:9

Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, 15:5

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, 18:1

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα, 19:1

μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτόν, 20:3

Only once does John use the singular τοῦτο, *this*, (7:1); elsewhere he uses the plural ταῦτα, *these things*. No obvious reason appears for this shift to the singular from the more common plural form. Possibly it signals use of a source material, or perhaps it represents nothing more than a stylistic shift.¹⁸ Grammatically, the singular τοῦτο bundles previous reference via the antecedent of this demonstrative pronoun into a single idea. The more common plural ταῦτα via the antecedent of the same demonstrative pronoun individualizes multiple previously made statements. But in such expressions not much difference would be present between the singular and plural uses of the demonstrative pronouns. Here the impact of τοῦτο is to refer back to the opening of the sixth seal as a single event, while the use of ταῦτα in v. 9 reaches back to the dual appearance of first the four angels and then the one angel in vv. 1-8. At minimal the use of Μετὰ τοῦτο / ταῦτα εἶδον signals the beginning of a new topic of presentation.¹⁹

This clear role strongly suggests that no chronological movement of time can be legitimately read into the preposition phrase Μετὰ τοῦτο. Instead, what John

¹⁸“The formulaic phrase μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον, ‘after this I saw,’ is used here to signal a change in subject and to introduce a new unit of text (the same formula is used in 4:1; 7:9; 15:5; 18:1). Since the author normally uses ταῦτα, ‘these things,’ however, this slight change in style may indicate an intrusive element in the composition.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 450.]

¹⁹In modern printed Greek New Testaments, such a role is further signaled by the capitalization of the first word of the sentence and also through the use of paragraph indentation. The reader should not overlook that originally Greek writings were written only with capital letters called uncials and with no spacing between words and without any punctuation marks. Thus signals of shifts in thought expression had to be incorporated into phraseology, etc. Two very commonly used devices were repetition of ‘introductory’ type phrases and the use of the vocative case words.

The formatting of the modern printed Greek texts represents editorial judgments based on middle ages patterns of writing Greek which were very different than in the ancient era. Additionally, analysis of the internal flow of thought plays a role in this process. And finally the dominate modern language background behind a particular Greek text will play a role. For example, *The Greek New Testament*, with its background heritage from the British Westcott-Hort Greek text of the NT in the late 1800s, will reflect formatting styles of British English. But the German background of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* means that formatting patterns typical of modern German will play a shaping role in these decisions for this Greek NT.

is saying here is that he is presenting the next item in his visionary image that he had seen earlier²⁰ on Patmos. It may precede, or follow, or be simultaneous with the preceding unit of the sixth seal.

1) John sees four angels, v.1 7.1 Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς, κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς ἵνα μὴ πνέῃ ἄνεμος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς μήτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μήτε ἐπὶ πᾶν δένδρον. 7.1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

John introduces this experience of the first segment of the ‘interlude’ in vv. 1-3 with εἶδον τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους, *I saw four angels*. Up to this point in Revelation John had encountered ἀγγέλους in a variety of settings: 1:1, 20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 5, 7, 14; 5:2, 11. Through the first three chapters these had come to him on Patmos (chapter one) or represented the seven churches (chapters two and three). In chapter five, the angels were located in heaven as a part of the apocalyptic scene there. But from chapter seven forward, angels will appear either individually or in groups of four, seven, or twelve. They show up in heaven, on the earth, between heaven and earth, in the sun etc. Their assigned tasks vary from pouring out divine wrath to protecting the people of God with many others tasks between these two.

The presence of four angels here are connected to ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς, *standing at the four corners of the earth*. Their function is specified in several ways:

a) κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς, *holding back the four winds of the earth* (7:1)

b) τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἀγγέλοις οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, *to the four angels to whom had been given to them to damage the earth and the sea* (7:2).

c) 14 λέγοντα τῷ ἔκτῳ ἀγγέλῳ, ὁ ἔχων τὴν σάλπιγγα· λῦσον τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους τοὺς δεδεμένους ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ. 15 καὶ ἐλύθησαν οἱ τέσσαρες ἄγγελοι οἱ ἠτοιμασμένοι εἰς τὴν ὥραν καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ μῆνα καὶ ἑνιαυτόν, ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων. 14 *It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” 15 And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very*

²⁰This allusion to his earlier experience on Patmos is clearly present with the uniform use of the aorist verb εἶδον, *I saw*, referring to past time action. This is also matched with the repeated use of the aorist ἤκουσα, *I heard*, throughout the document as well. These are the two key ways of John referring to what he had seen and heard in the vision on Patmos. How much time elapsed between the experiencing of the vision and the written composition of his recollections of it is never specified, but that there was a gap between these two events is beyond question.

hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind (9:14-15).

What should be noted here is that in chapter seven these four angels are introduced to the reader, but not until the command of the sixth angel with a trumpet are they given permission to carry out their work on earth. It is no accident that they are introduced after the sixth seal is opened and then granted permission to go to work in the sixth trumpet. As we will note later on, a strong parallelism between the seals and the trumpet series exists in the text.

In this opening scene the four angels are ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς, *standing at the four corners of the earth*. Here is reflected the typical flat earth perspective universally believed across the various cultures in the ancient world.²¹ Found also in 20:8, this compass oriented image signals the entire earth being covered.²²

These angels also are κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς ἵνα μὴ πνέῃ ἄνεμος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς μήτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μήτε ἐπὶ πᾶν δένδρον, *holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree*. Again the four winds was an image understood to include all the winds that could blow on the earth.²³ Here the angels control these

²¹“The phrase αἱ τέσσαρες γωνίαι as ‘the four quarters’ of the compass is a widespread cosmological conception in the ancient world and is also found in Rev 20:8 (see Job 37:3; Isa 11:12 [literally ‘the four wings, MT כַּנְפוֹת *kanpōl*; LXX πτερυγῶν] of the earth’; Jer 49:36 uses the phrase ‘from the four ends [MT רִקְצֹת *qēšōt*; LXX Jer 25:16, ἄκρων] of the earth’; Ptolemy Tetrabiblos 29; T. Asher 7:2; Pliny Hist. nat. 2.46.119). PGM VIII.8 speaks of αἱ δ’ ἑσθλὰ οὐρανοῦ, ‘the four quarters of heaven,’ while PGM 15a.8–11 refers to ‘the light from the four corners of the cosmos [κόσμου]’ (see Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 2:103). The perspective of the author is determined by his presence in a prophetic trance in the heavenly court from 4:1 to 6:17. That heavenly perspective continues to be presupposed since the author claims to see the four angels standing at the four corners of the earth (conceived of as a flat, square shape).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 450.]

²²For many centuries the global sphere image of the earth has been established scientifically. And one should not overlook the huge controversy that this shift from a flat earth to a ball concept produced with the discoveries of [Nicolaus Copernicus](#) in the early 1500s. Amazingly there still exists a [FLAT EARTH SOCIETY](#) which seriously promotes this nonsense in a modern age.

²³“κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς, ‘restraining the four winds of the earth.’ In ancient Israel, as in the rest of the ancient world, the four winds represented the four cardinal points of the compass and included all winds (see Ezek 37:9; Jer 49:36; Dan 7:2; 8:8; 11:4; Zech 2:6; 6:5; 4 Ezra 13:5; 1 Enoch 18:2; Mark 13:27 = Matt 24:31; Jos. J. W. 6.300; Adam and Eve 38.3 [Denis, *Concordance*, 817]; PGM IV.3066; Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 2:103). Greco-Roman texts also refer to the four winds (Pliny Hist. nat. 2.46.119 [who insists that there are really two winds from each direction]; Vettius Valens 140.6; P. Flor. 20.19; 50.104; PGM III.273, 496; IV.1606). The storehouses of the winds are mentioned

winds so that at this point no harm comes from them on the earth. Given the widespread folktales in the Greco-Roman literature about the difficulties of controlling the winds, John’s readers in Asia would have clearly understood the significance of God’s power in exerting such control over the wind.²⁴

in 1 Enoch 18:1; 2 Enoch (J) 40:10. God controls the winds, bringing them from their storehouses (Ps 135:7; Jer 10:13; 51:16), a view also expressed in the Jewish magical papyrus entitled the “Recipe of Pibeches” (PGM IV.3007–86; see J. van Haelst, *Catalogue*, no. 1074), referring to God as ‘the one who stirs up the four winds’ (line 3066). 1 Enoch 76:1–14 describes the twelve gates through which come the winds from the four directions; through four of those gates come good winds, and through eight come winds of punishment. 4 Ezra 8:22 indicates that angels are changed to wind and fire at the command of God (probably based on Ps 104:4, quoted in Heb 1:7), and 1QH 1:10–11 speaks of the winds as ‘angels of holiness.’ In Jub. 2:2, the ‘angels of the spirit of the winds’ are mentioned, and in 3 Enoch 14:4, the angel Ruhiel is said to be in charge of the wind. The four winds are also described as supports for the earth and the firmament of heaven (1 Enoch 18:2). The four winds can also be agents of divine judgment in scattering a people (Jer 49:36). In Gos. Bartholomew 31–36, which originated in the third century (Hennecke-Schneemelcher, NTA 1:498), the four angels who are in charge of the winds are named and described: (1) Chairum rules over Boreas and prevents the earth from drying up. (2) Oertha rules over Aparkti and prevents the earth from freezing. (3) Kerkutha rules over the south wind and prevents the earth from shaking. (4) Naoutha rules over the southwest wind and prevents the earth from burning up. Jerome (Comm. in Dan. 7:2–3) suggests that the four winds mentioned in Daniel are angelic powers. In line with this there is also a tradition in early Judaism that angels were identical with the winds, a notion based on Ps 104:4 (1QH 1:10–11; Jub. 2:2; 4 Ezra 8:22; Pirque R. El. 4; Str-B, 3:678–79). Ptolemy Tetrabiblos 29 reflects the view that the winds originate at the four quarters of the horizon.

“In the Greek and Roman worlds, the four winds were often personified. In several Mithraic monuments, two or four great winds (Favonius, Auster, Eurus, Aquilo) are depicted with wings on their heads and blowing from the four points of the compass (Vermaseren, *CIMRM*, 1083, 1283, 1292, 1300, 1331, 1388, 1685); on the representation of the windson Mithraic monuments, see L. A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 162–80. According to the Coptic-Gnostic tractate Paraph. Shem 27.26–27 (tr. J. M. Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 353), ‘For without wind and star nothing happens upon the earth.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 450–451.]

²⁴“Many folktales deal with the problem of controlling the winds (see S. Thompson, *Motif-Index*, D2142). Many of these stories have been collected by J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1911) 1:319–20; see Page, *Folktales*, 74–78. The earliest Greek story of an attempt to control the winds (and thus the weather) is found in *Odyssey* 10.1–76, where Odysseus narrates the story of Aeolus, whom Zeus had made steward of the winds. To provide safe passage home to Ithaca for Odysseus and his crew, Aeolus presented him with an ox-hide bag of storm winds tied with a silver cord so that he could reach home without experiencing contrary winds. While Odysseus slept, and when they were in sight of Ithaca, the crew opened the bag thinking it was treasure. The released storm winds drove them back to the island of

The objective of the angels' control over the winds is ἵνα μὴ πνέῃ ἄνεμος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς μήτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μήτε ἐπὶ πᾶν δένδρον, *so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree.*²⁵ At this point the mission of the angels is to prevent damage being done to the earth. This restraining is for the purpose of providing opportunity to mark the people of God on earth. But as is indicated in the sixth trumpet (9:13-16), the four angels are released to inflict great harm on the earth, although not by releasing the winds.

2) John sees another angel, vv. 2-3 2 Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἀναβαίνοντα ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου ἔχοντα σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλη τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἄγγελοις οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν 3 λέγων· μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν. 2 I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, 3 saying, "Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads."

Not only does John see the four angels but another one becomes visible to him. This one is on earth as well and makes his appearance with the rising of the sun in the eastern horizon: ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἀναβαίνοντα

Aeolus, where they received a chilly reception." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 451.]

²⁵Each of the four angels is presumably restraining one of the four winds, but it is not immediately evident why the winds should be restrained from blowing, though the assumption is that they will cause some type of terrible damage. In a fragment of Empedocles (Diels-Kranz, FVS 1:353, frag. B111), he appears to refer to the powers of a divine man: 'You stop the power of tireless winds which move upon the earth, and by their blowing destroy the farmland; and again, if you have the will, you can summon the winds to return.' In v 2 these angels are further characterized as those with the power to harm the earth and the sea. Presumably, this harm will come from the winds they are restraining. The trees are not mentioned here as they are in v 1. However, the potentially dangerous winds are not referred to again elsewhere in Revelation. Some have regarded this scene as a doublet of the opening of the first four seals, each of which unleashes a different plague on the world. A close parallel occurs in 2 Apoc. Bar. 6:4–5 (tr. A. F. J. Klijn in Charlesworth, OTP 1:622–23), "And I saw, and behold, there were standing four angels at the four corners of the city [i.e., 'Jerusalem'], each of them with a burning torch in his hands. And another angel came down from heaven and said to them, 'Hold your torches and do not light them before I say it to you.'" J. Weiss understands the restraining of the four plague-bringing winds as a flashback introducing the protection of the 144,000 by sealing before the first six seals are opened (Offenbarung, 72); there is no indication in the text, however, that the author or the final redactor understood Rev 7 in this way." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 451–452.]

ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου, *another angel coming up from the rising of the sun.* This is quite a spectacular entrance as he rises up into the air with the morning sun as his backdrop.

But what he is holding is of greater importance: ἔχοντα σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος, *having a seal of the living God.* Here we are not told exactly what this is or what it looks like. This 'stamp' later on seems to be what is used to imprint the name of God and of the Lamb on the foreheads of God's people: cf. 14:1; 22:4; 3:12. But the idea of God having a sealing instrument was not uncommon in John's world.²⁶ Both the identificational

²⁶"The signet or seal is not further described (though it is assumed that it is an object, like a signet ring or a cylinder seal, that can make an impression on something), nor is that which is sealed on the foreheads of the servants of God explained (v 3). Not until 14:1 is it made clear that the name of the Lamb and the name of his Father are written (the term σφραγίζειν, 'to seal,' is not used) on the foreheads of the faithful. The seal is understood, at least in the final revision of Revelation, as the name of the Lamb and of his Father, mentioned explicitly in 14:1 (see 3:12; 22:4); see Dölger, Sphragis, 57. The terms σφραγίς, 'seal, signet' (7:2; 9:4), and σφραγίζειν, 'to seal' (7:3, 4[2x], 5, 8), are used in this chapter (and in 9:4) in an eschatological sense, as in Ezek 9:4–6 [cited in CD 19:12]; Pss. Sol. 15:6 (σημεῖον τοῦ θεοῦ, 'mark of God'), 9 (σημεῖον τῆς ἀπωλείας, 'mark of destruction'); 4 Ezra 6:5; 8:53. Further, sealing is used here as a symbol of divine protection, as Rev 9:4 makes clear: the demonic locusts are told to harm 'only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads' (this is the only other use of σφραγ- terms in Revelation). Further, both Ezek 9:4–6 and Pss. Sol. 15:6 use the metaphor of sealing in the context of the concept of the remnant. The currency of the sealing notion in apocalyptic circles is supported by 4 Ezra 6:5, which refers to eschatological sealing as if it were a well-known concept: 'the schemes of its sinners had not yet been outlawed, nor had God's seal yet been set on those who have stored up a treasure of fidelity.' The notion of sealing is combined with the motif of the numerus iustorum in 5 Ezra 2:38, 40:

Rise, stand up, and see the whole company of those who bear the Lord's mark and sit at his table. ... Receive, O Zion, your full number, and close the roll of those arrayed in white who have faithfully kept the law of the Lord.

"Gen 4:15 offers a further parallel for a protective mark (the nature of which cannot be known) within the context of a curse: 'And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him' (see Westermann, "Excursus: The Mark of Cain," in Genesis 1:312–14). The protective function of sealing is made explicit in the Coptic-Gnostic tractate Ap. John 31.22–25 (tr. J. M. Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 122), 'And I raised him up and sealed him in the light of the water with five seals, in order that death might not have power over him from this time on.' The protective or apotropaic function of magical sealing is a motif frequently encountered in ancient texts and in inscriptions on amulets and other materia magica. An inscription on an Aramaic incantation bowl reads 'that seal with which the First Adam sealed his son Seth to protect him from demons' (Isbell, Incantation, text 16.3, p. 54). Similarly, in Acts Andrew 27 (ed. MacDonald, Acts), seven demons will not attack Andrew because of the seal on his forehead. On an apotropaic copper amulet from Smyrna, which contains Jewish motifs and a magical formula with a few Chris-

Thus the protective power guaranteeing the sealing comes out of heaven and is real.

This other angel also speaks loudly: *καὶ ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἀγγέλοις οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν*, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea.²⁸ He speaks, not to John, but to the group of four angels covering the earth. This only happens once more in Revelation where one angel speaks to another: cf. 14:18. Here we discover more about the function of the four angels while standing at the four corners of the earth: *οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν*, to whom had been give to them to harm the earth and the sea. Interestingly, damaging the trees is never mentioned outside of vv. 1 & 3. This angel speaks *φωνῇ μεγάλῃ*, in a loud voice, thus underscoring the urgency and authority behind his speaking.

What this angel says is the most important matter: λέγων· μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν, *saying, “Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”* These four angels are to retrain from action on the earth until all τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, the servants of our God, are fully protected by a seal on their foreheads.²⁹ 17:11; Jos. As. 8:5, 6; 11:10; T. Job 37.2; Matt 16:16; 26:63; John 6:69 [var. lect.]; Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26; 2 Cor 3:3; 6:16; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Tim 3:15; 4:10; Heb 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; 2 Clem. 20:2; Hermas Vis. 2.3.2; 3.7.2; Sim. 6.2.2.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 454.]

²⁸“There are just two certain instances in Revelation in which particular angelic beings issue commands to others (7:2; 14:18; cf. 16:1), perhaps reflecting an implicit assumption of an angelic hierarchy. The aorist passive verb ἐδόθη is another example of the *passivum divinum*, indicating that God has given these angels the task in question (see Comment on 9:3).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 455.]

²⁹“The first-person plural form of the verb σφραγίσωμεν, ‘we seal,’ is enigmatic since it is not clear who in addition to the angel bearing the signet of God could be part of the subject of this verb. This sealing is a sign of divine protection, which is explicitly said to protect those sealed from the fifth trumpet plague in 9:4: ‘But they were instructed not to harm the grass of the earth nor any plant nor any tree, with the exception of people who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads.’ See also T. Job 5.1, where after promising Job that he will not die, an angel seals Job before Satan begins to torment him (parallels in B. Schaller, *Das Testament Hiobs*, JSRZ 3.3 [Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979] 330). The combination of the notions of sealing or tattooing with the term δούλοι, ‘slaves, servants,’ indicates that this metaphor is derived from the Eastern practice of tattooing secular and religious slaves (Dölger, *Sphragis*, 58). One important issue in this verse is the problem of determining whether the verb σφραγίζω, ‘seal,’ has any connection with Christian baptism or the complex of rituals associated with baptism (see Excursus 7A: Marking, Branding, and Tattooing in the

Ancient World). While the notion of ‘sealing’ in 7:2–8 certainly is a metaphor for ownership, it is unlikely that it is a metaphor for either Christian baptism or the reception of the Holy Spirit (against Prigent, 120; Roloff [ET] 97; Giesen, 194). While Prigent, Roloff, and Giesen understand ‘sealing’ as baptism, and the 144,000 as Christians, the fact that some but not all the ‘twelve tribes of the sons of Israel’ were sealed means that the group from which the sealed were selected was obviously not sealed and hence cannot be Christians. To understand ‘sealing’ as baptism, these scholars must ignore the basic character of the metaphor that presents the 144,000 as sealed from a presumably larger ‘unsealed’ group.

“This verse alludes to LXX Ezek 9:4, where those who mourned the pollution of the temple are marked on the forehead to protect them from the angels about to destroy Jerusalem: *δοῦς τὸ σημεῖον ἐπὶ τὰ μέτωπα τῶν ἀνδρῶν*, ‘Place a sign on the foreheads of the men.’ The significance of this marking is that it indicates both divine protection and divine ownership (Lampe, *Seal*, 16). In CD (MS B) 19:10–12, Ezek 9:4 is referred to in connection with the protection of the faithful members of the covenant community, called the ‘little ones’ and ‘the poor of the flock’ (tr. P. R. Davies, *Covenant*, 257):

These shall escape at the time of the visitation, and those who are left shall be delivered to the sword when the Messiah of Israel and Aaron comes. (It will be) as it was in the time of the first visitation, as He said by the hand of Ezekiel: “to make a mark upon the foreheads of those who sigh and groan.”

“Isa 44:5 is an appropriate parallel (RSV): “This one will say, ‘I am the Lord’s,’ another will call himself by the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord’s’ [LXX καὶ ἕτερος ἐπιγράψει τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι], and surname himself by the name of Israel.” J. Finegan (*Archaeology*, 224–25) argues that the use of the definite article with τῶ *tāw*, as in CD (MS B) 19:12 quoted above, which reads *ἡτῶ hattāyw*, or in Origen *Selecta* in Ezekiel 9, where τοῦ Θεοῦ is said to stand in the Greek versions of Aquila and Theodotion, refers to an alphabetic character, *taw*, a letter represented in archaic Hebrew script with X (see the “Table of Scripts” in Gibson, *Inscriptions* 1:117–18). Brownlee (*Ezekiel*, 140) translates the relevant phrase in Ezek 9:4 ‘mark with an X the foreheads of people.’ Ezek 9:4 has also influenced Pss. Sol. 15:8, 10, where we read ‘The mark of God is upon the righteous that they may be saved, whereas it is said of sinners that ‘the mark of destruction is upon their forehead.’” In b. Šabb. 55a (tr. Epstein, *Talmud*), ‘a taw of ink upon the foreheads of the righteous’ and ‘a taw of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked’ are mentioned. In b. Šabb. 120b, bathing is forbidden to one who has the divine name written (כתב *kētāb*) on his skin (see b. Yoma 8a); see Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 244. An allusion to Rev 22:4 may be reflected in what appears to be a Christian interpolation into T. Sol. 17:4 (tr. Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:977):

So I said to him, “Fear the God of heaven and earth and tell me by what angel you are thwarted.” He replied, “He who is about to return (as) Savior thwarts me. If his mark [στουχεῖον] is written on (one’s) forehead, it thwarts me, and because I am afraid of it, I quickly turn and flee from him. This is the sign of the cross.”

“Divine protection was provided for Israelites who marked the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a sacrificial lamb (Exod 12:7), and many have seen Exodus imagery in this chapter. That this sealing is for the purpose of protecting the 144,000 is clear from 9:4, which explicitly states that only people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads are to be harmed by the plague unleashed by the fifth trumpet.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*,

These are not further identified until the list in vv. 4-8, which doesn't spell out in precise terms whether Jews are Christians are in view. The purpose of this marking becomes clear with the blowing of the fifth trumpet where the 'locusts' were permitted to harm everyone and everything on earth except εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οἵτινες οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων. *except those have the seal of God upon their foreheads* (9:4). This seal will protect those belonging to God through the times of calamity that will fall upon the earth.

Who will do the sealing of these individuals on earth? Interestingly the answer comes with ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν, *until we have sealed*. The angel indicates that the task goes to several individuals, but exactly who those are is not specified. Other angels would be the natural assumption in this plural verb form.

In the background of this sealing action clearly lies Ezek. 9:4 (LXX):

καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν Δίελθε μέσσην τὴν Ἱερουσαλημ καὶ δὸς τὸ σημεῖον ἐπὶ τὰ μέτωπα τῶν ἀνδρῶν τῶν καταστεναζόντων καὶ τῶν κατωδυνωμένων ἐπὶ πάσαις ταῖς ἀνομίαις ταῖς γινομέναις ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς.

and said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it."

Clearly the marking of the faithful among the Jews in Jerusalem during Ezekiel's time was the point of this sealing process. Additionally the background of Isa. 44:5 underscores that it is not those who claim to belong to God who are protected. Rather it is only those whom God marks out as His own who receive His protection. When the floodgates of divine wrath are poured out on the earth, it is only those who are marked who are protected from that wrath (cf. 9:4).

B. John hears a census list number, vv. 4-8.

4 Καὶ ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν **ἐσφραγισμένων**, ἑκατὸν τεσσαεράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, **ἐσφραγισμένοι** ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ·

5 ἐκ φυλῆς Ἰουδα δώδεκα χιλιάδες **ἐσφραγισμένοι**,

ἐκ φυλῆς Ῥουβὴν δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

ἐκ φυλῆς Γὰδ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

6 ἐκ φυλῆς Ἀσὴρ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

ἐκ φυλῆς Νεφθαλὶμ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

ἐκ φυλῆς Μανασσῆ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

7 ἐκ φυλῆς Συμεὼν δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

ἐκ φυλῆς Λευὶ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

ἐκ φυλῆς Ἰσσαχάρ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

8 ἐκ φυλῆς Ζαβουλὼν δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

ἐκ φυλῆς Ἰωσήφ δώδεκα χιλιάδες,

ἐκ φυλῆς Βενιαμὶν δώδεκα χιλιάδες

ἐσφραγισμένοι.

4 And I heard the number of those who were **sealed**, one hundred forty-four thousand, **sealed** out of every tribe of the people of Israel:

5 From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand **sealed**, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,

6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,

7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,

8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand **sealed**.

Who are represented by these?³⁰ Numerous pro-

^{30c}While the 144,000 have been identified in a variety of ways, there are several interpretive constraints that limit the range of acceptable solutions: (a) According to Rev 7:4b, '144,000 were marked from every tribe of the sons of Israel [ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ]'; i.e., those who are sealed are part of a larger group, for ἐκ + genitive here is a partitive genitive, indicating that a limited number are separated from a larger group. Whatever 'the tribes of the sons of Israel' represents, 12,000 from each tribe can only mean a portion of those who make up the whole 'tribe' (Caird, 96). This view is confirmed by the allusion to Ezek 9:4 in Rev 7:4-8, for in Ezekiel's vision only some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were marked with a tau so that they would be saved by the angelic destroyers (in turn an allusion to the protective marking during Passover in Exod 12:23). (b) There are striking differences between the two groups described in Rev 7:4-8 and 7:9-17 that must be borne in mind: (i) There is a clear contrast between the specific enumeration of the 144,000 (7:4-8) and the vast size of the great multitude, which 'no one was able to number' (7:9); the latter is obviously a much larger group than the former and therefore very probably a different group (Allo, 92). (ii) The 144,000 are composed of 12,000 drawn from each of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, while the members of the great multitude in explicit contrast, according to 7:9, are drawn from 'every nation and tribe and people and language group' (Zahn, 368). (iii) The 144,000 are apparently located on earth while the innumerable multitude is in heaven before the throne of God (7:11). (iv) In 7:4-8, the 144,000 are in a situation of imminent peril that requires protective sealing (see Rev 9:4), while the innumerable multitude in 7:9-17 has passed victoriously through the great tribulation and has received a heavenly reward. (c) The 144,000 appear once again in 14:1-5, and the determination of their identity must be based on this passage as well, at least so far as the final edition of Revelation is concerned (J. Weiss, Offenbarung, 65), though some deny the identity of these groups (Allo, 92). (d) Whether or not 7:4-8 is based on a Jewish source, the passage must be interpreted in terms of how it functions in its present literary context (Taeger, Johannesapokalypse, 30). (e) The seal of God explicitly provides special protection for the wrath of God that is coming upon the world (9:4); there is no explicit indication that the sealed are not protected from the wrath of the ungodly (even though this is the claim of many commentators). In many early Christian texts, the eschatological tribulation was thought to be a present feature of Christian experience in the world, and no distinction was made between plagues

and punishments sent by God upon humankind and the hostility and persecution inflicted on Christians by Jews and pagans (Mark 13:9–20 = Matt 24:9–22 = Luke 21:12–24; Did 16:5).

“2. The 144, 000 as Jews or Jewish Christians, i.e., the faithful remnant of Israel (Eichhorn, 1:228; Bousset [1906] 287; Zahn, 368; Allo, 93; Comblin, *AsSeign* 66 [1973] 42–49; Corsini, *Apocalypse*, 158–60; Draper, *JSNT* 19 [1985] 136; Glasson, 52; W. J. Harrington, *Apocalypse*, 129; Kraft, 126; Rowland, 91). Many who think that Rev 7:4–8 is based on a Jewish source hold that while the 144,000 may have originally referred to Jews or the real Israel, that source has been reinterpreted by the author to refer to a different group, such as the Christian church or Christian martyrs (J. Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 67; Beckwith, 535; Beasley-Murray, 141). There are others, however, who think that whether or not 7:4–8 is based on a Jewish source, the text in its present context refers to Jews (Draper, *JSNT* 19 [1985] 133–47; Comblin, *AsSeign* 66 [1973] 42–49; Buchanan, 189–91).

“There are several arguments that proponents of this view put forward: (a) The detailed enumeration of 12,000 sealed from each of the twelve tribes of Israel suggests that Jews or Jewish Christians are in view, for while ‘the twelve tribes in dispersion’ (Jas 1:1; cf. Herm. Sim. 9.17.1) can be used in a Christian context to represent the Christian church, a detailed enumeration of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes does not lend itself easily to allegorization (Bousset [1906] 283, 287). (b) Since the author is undoubtedly a Jewish Christian (contra MacKenzie, *Author of the Apocalypse*), it is not particularly surprising that he would have envisioned a special role in the eschaton for Christians of Jewish origin (Bousset [1906] 288–89; Allo, 93). Paul struggled with the problem of the rejection of the gospel by most Jews in Rom 9–11, recognizing that not everyone descended from Israel belongs to the true Israel (Rom 9:6), yet nevertheless held out the eschatological hope that Israel would eventually be converted (Rom 11:25–27). The eschatological tradition of the future gathering of Israel and the Gentiles at the New Jerusalem at the coming of Christ is found elsewhere in early Christian literature, e.g., T. Benj. 9:2, ‘and there [at the temple of God] the twelve tribes and all the Gentiles will be gathered together’ (see also Justin Dial. 24.3; 80.1). (c) Those who argue that the 144,000 are Jewish Christians frequently cite Rom 11:7, where Paul refers to the ‘elect’ (ἐκλογή) or ‘remnant’ (λείμμα) of Israel (i.e., Jewish Christians; see v 5) who believed that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel while the rest of Israel had rejected the messianic status of Jesus. The idea of a remnant of Israel that remains faithful to the covenant, as found in the OT (TDNT 4:196–209; NIDNTT 3:247–51), has certainly informed Paul in Rom 11:1–10 (TDNT 4:209–14; NIDNTT 3:251–53), and may well provide the background against which Rev 7:4–8 should be read. (d) The 144,000 as Jewish Christians are the ‘first fruits’ of those first chosen to receive the gospel (Allo, 93). (e) Zahn suggests that the number 144,000 approximated the real number of Christians of Jewish origin at the time Revelation was written (371–72). Acts 21:20 speaks of the many ten thousands of Jews who have believed the gospel. (f) For those who assume that ‘sealing’ symbolizes baptism or salvation, it is more likely that those who remained ‘unsealed’ are Jews rather than Christians, for it is easier to conceive of ‘unsealed’ Jews than ‘unsealed’ Christians. (g) The distinction between Jewish and gentile Christians (sometimes called the ‘circumcised’ and ‘uncircumcised,’ or ‘Jews’ and ‘Greeks,’ respectively) pervades early Christian literature even though there is a complementary recognition that the latter as well as the former are part of the new people of God (Acts 10:45; 11:1, 19–20; 13:16–17, 26; 19:10; Rom 1:16; 3:29–30; 9:6–8; 10:12–13;

posed identities have been suggested down through the centuries. But some limits of definition in the text itself narrow down the options considerably.

a) The 144,000 clearly means a small number out of a larger group.

b) The naming of the twelve Jewish tribes suggests it has something to do with Jews.

c) The consistent number of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes in no way represents a literal number, since a few of the tribes were many times larger than several of the very small tribes.

d) John only hears the number called out, and must wait until later before seeing them (cf. 14:1–5). Thus 7:4–8 provides little signal of identification of these apart from a purely spiritual ID of devotion to God through Christ. Their ID on their foreheads in 14:1 in-

1 Cor 1:24; 12:13; Gal 2:7–8; 3:28; Eph 2:11–19). It would therefore not be surprising to find ethnic Jews distinguished from Christians of gentile origin. (h) The term σφραγίς, ‘seal,’ is sometimes used of the rite of circumcision (Rom 4:11; Barn. 9:6–8).

“Opponents of this view have proposed a number of arguments against interpreting the 144,000 as Jews or Jewish Christians: (a) The twelve tribes did not literally exist in the first century A.D., and the hope of their eventual restoration belonged not to the real but to the ideal world (Behm, 45; Caird, 95; Mounce, 168; Boring, 129; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991] 67). Against this objection it can be countered that Josephus, writing at the end of the first century A.D., reckoned with the existence of twelve tribes in his day (Ant. 11.133) and that the widespread Jewish eschatological hope of the regathering of the twelve tribes of Israel was certainly based on the assumption of their actual existence in the world (see Comment on Rev 7:4b). (b) The distinction between Jewish Christianity and gentile Christianity, common in the early decades of the apostolic age, was no longer current at the end of the first century (Behm, 45). Against this position it may be argued that the debate between Christianity and Judaism continued well into the second century, as evident in Barnabas and the Dialogue of Justin (Hvalvik, *Struggle*, 213–321). (c) So many ways of describing the real Israel have been applied to the Church in Revelation that it would be perverse to treat Rev 7:4–8 as an exception to the rule (Caird, 95). To this it may be replied that, while certain OT language used of Israel is applied to Christians, e.g., that Christians are a ‘kingdom’ and ‘priests’ (an allusion to Exod 19:6 found in Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; probably traditional since it also occurs in 1 Pet 2:9), the use of other traditional language in Revelation suggests that the Church is constituted of both Jews and Gentiles; e.g., the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem bear the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel (20:12–13; an eschatological tradition found in Ezek 48:30–35; 1QTemple 39:13–13; 40:11–14; description of the New Jerusalem: 4Q554 2:12–3:9), while the twelve foundations of the city bear the names of the twelve apostles. (d) The author equates the 144,000 in Rev 7:4–8 with the 144,000 in 14:1–5, and the latter cannot be considered Jews or Jewish Christians (Boring, 129). To this it may be countered that since the author contrasts the two groups it cannot be assumed without detailed argumentation that they are identical.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 440–442.]

cluded the name of Christ as well as of God. Later in 14:1-5 they are all standing on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem with Christ learning a new chant coming out of heaven. Interestingly more identification of them is provided there in 14:3b-5:

3b εἰ μὴ αἱ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, οἱ ἡγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς. 4 οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γὰρ εἰσιν, οὗτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ. οὗτοι ἡγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ, 5 καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος, ἄμωμοί εἰσιν.

3b No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth. 4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.

f) All kinds of puzzling issues arise with the comparison of this listing to the tribal lists in the OT, not to mention those in intertestamental Judaism, including:

Why was the tribe of Dan omitted from the list?³¹ Perhaps because of the negative image that this

³¹“The tribe of Dan is conspicuous by its absence in this list and has apparently been replaced here by Manasseh (n.b. that the tribe of Levi, often absent from tribal lists in the OT, is included in the tribal roster in v 7b). Dan and Naphtali are absent from the tribal list in Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 25:4 (certainly on the basis of corrupt transmission), though they are present in 25:9. Several possible reasons have been suggested for this substitution: (1) The tribe of Dan had a negative reputation in the OT (Gen 49:17; Judg 18:30; Jer 8:16) and early Judaism (in Vitae Proph. 3.17–20, the prophet Ezekiel pronounces judgment on the tribes of Dan and Gad for persecuting those who kept the law). However, Dan was not blacklisted in early Judaism, for none of the many lists of the twelve tribes in early Jewish literature omits Dan (with the exception of Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 25:4, an accidental omission). Not only that, but there is a tradition that the mother of the Messiah would be a Danite (Gen. Rab. 97.9; ed. Theodor-Albeck): “This is the Messiah ben David who will arise from two tribes: his father from Judah and his mother from Dan.” (2) Dan was thought to be an apostate tribe (Str-B, 3:804–5), a postbiblical development of the tradition mentioned in the biblical passages listed under (1). T. Dan 5:4–8 predicts the apostasy of the tribe of Dan, though the restoration of Dan is predicted in 5:9–13. (3) Antichrist was expected to come from the tribe of Dan (Bousset, *Antichrist*, 26, 171–74; K. Berger, *Daniel-Diegeese*, 101 [with additional references to the connection of Antichrist with Dan in Christian apocalypses]; C. R. Smith, *JETS* 38 [1995] 217). However, the earliest references to this tradition are found in Irenaeus 5.30.2, commenting on Jer 8:16, understood as a prophecy of the coming of Antichrist from the tribe of Dan in the east (“This too is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse along with those which are saved”), and in Hippolytus de Ant. 14.5–6 (“Just as Christ is born of the tribe of Judah, so Antichrist shall be born from the tribe of Dan”).

tribe had among Jews. Maybe because Jewish messianic belief contended that the Anti-Christ would come from this tribe. Why was the tribe of Manasseh inserted instead of Dan when it is paired with Ephraim in the OT lists? Perhaps Epistle of Barnabas 13:4-6 in the early second century provides a hint, but this is not clear. Why is the tribe of Levi included when it isn't in most OT lists due to non allotment of land. In the OT lists it is included in non-military censuses (cf. Num. 3:14-39; 26:57-62). Why is the tribe of Joseph listed here, along with one of his two sons Manasseh? Usually in the OT lists his name is substituted with that of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Why does John list the tribes in this order, since no OT list follows this order?³² These, and several additional variations, in John's list urge serious caution in simply equating the 144,00 with covenant Israel. The non Jewish labeling of the 144,00 in 14:1-5 further urges this caution.

What one can legitimately conclude about these 144,000 is that they represent a smaller group of true saints of God out of a larger group with some religious identification toward God. Whether these are Jewish Christians in distinction from Judaism in general, or whether they symbolically represent the true Israel of authentic Christians out of a larger group of merely for-

Hill suggests that the tradition may be quite old even though it first appears in Irenaeus (JTS 46 [1995] 99–117). The tradition is not found in any Jewish sources and cannot therefore be confidently thought to be pre-Christian, despite Bousset's arguments (*Antichrist*, 171–74). The views of Irenaeus and Hippolytus influenced the Christian understanding of Rev 7:8; Andreas Comm. in Apoc. ad 7:8, and 16:12: “It is likely that the Antichrist will come from the eastern section of the land of Persia, where the tribe of Dan of Hebrew extraction is.” (4) This list of twelve tribes has been partially assimilated to the list of twelve apostles in which, just as Matthias replaced the apostate Judas, so Dan has been replaced by Manasseh (C. R. Smith, *JSNT* 39 [1990] 115–16). (5) Sanderson (*Scripture* 3/4 [1948] 114–15) speculated that “Δάν” was omitted through a scribal error in which the abbreviation “Μαν[ασση]” replaced “Δάν.” (6) The simplest and most likely solution, however, is that Dan was dropped to keep the total number of tribes to twelve (Bauckham, *JSNT* 42 [1991] 113).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 462–463.]

³²“What determines the order of the tribes of Israel listed in 7:4–8? There is no list of the sons of Israel or of the tribes of Israel in the OT that corresponds exactly to the list in Rev 7:4–8, with regard to either order or content. It must also be observed, however, that few lists of the tribes of Israel within the OT itself are exactly identical with regard to order or number. This means that even though agreement in order or content cannot be expected, it might be possible to account for the particular order of the list in Revelation. There are several lists of the sons or tribes of Israel in the OT (Gen 35:22b–26; 46:8–27; Exod 1:2–4 [Joseph omitted for narrative purposes]; Num 1:4–15; 13:4–16). The first list is found in Gen 35:22b–26 (reproduced in Jub. 33:22 and Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 8:6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 464.]

mal Christians cannot be said with certainty. We find no help in any of the other apocalyptic writings either Jewish or later Christian, since a group labeled the 144,000 is never mentioned, nor is there any listing of the twelve tribes of Israel.

But what is affirmed by the text here in very clear terms is that they genuinely belong to God through commitment of Christ. And also that God places His protection on them to insulate them from the huge outpouring of His wrath upon the earth. Indeed they are still on earth when the calamities come and endure them, but God stands with them and brings them through all this, as 14:1-5 make clear.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

After the loosing of the sixth seal, which points to the ultimate outpouring of God's wrath upon the earth in the last days of human history, the visions of chapter seven focus our attention back to the martyred saints under the heavenly altar in the fifth seal. Is John taking us back to a depiction of how they ended up as martyrs under the throne? Very possibly so!

The image of the angels poised to unleash punishment upon the earth for what they have done to God's saints in vv. 1-3 is graphic and frightening. The powers of heaven are prepared and ready to punish the earth. But first the true servants of God must be protected with a mark on their foreheads so that the angels will not harm them as they will everyone else. Were these the martyred saints in the fifth seal? Maybe, but it seems as though these are the people of God still on earth seeking to be faithful to God in spite of all the corruption and hostility.

The believers in the churches at Asia could well identify with these folks in chapter seven. The presence of false teachers and false teaching detailed in chapters two and three may be the key for seeing the need for the true saints being labeled 144,000, a smaller group of authentic believers in the midst of a larger professing group. Some were of Jewish background and others were non-Jewish, but they shared a genuine faith in Christ in the face of the claims of the synagogues as the true people of God. They were ridiculed and criticized by the non-believers all around them. To hear affirmation from John's vision that the true servants of God will be validated and protected while the rest suffer His wrath was indeed a powerful message.

And this remains a powerful message to authentic believers in the modern world. Churches today are being bombarded with false teaching, and many are seduced into following it. Inside every church is a core of true believers, while many with church connection remain on the fringes of Christianity with only an empty phony identification. Times of hostility and persecution

of Christianity will bring about a purging of such from authentic Christianity. And to the faithful 'remnant' of believers comes John's message of God's stamping you with His mark of identification and protection. That indeed is a powerful message of hope and encouragement.