

o6. Apocalypse 4:1 – 7:8

The Transcendent (4-5)

Scene 2 Six Seals broken (6)

Interlude (7:1-8)



Penetrating to THE TRANSCENDENT (2)

John was told: **‘Write what you see, what is and what is to take place after this’**(1:19). In his seven letters to the churches he has written about ‘what is’. For the rest of the book he is writing about ‘what is to take place after this’. He is sharing with his readers an inspired insight into their situation, drawing on his faith in what God has already done in Christ, and in the transcendent design which God has for the world as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Before focusing upon what is going to happen to the communities, he penetrates history to the divine reality that transcends it. Only a prophet can ‘see’ to the heart. Everything is to be seen in the light of what John describes here.

Apocalypse 4:1 [modelled on Ezekiel 1:1ff]

1. Jesus reveals God's purpose

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet [1:10] said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'

It is important to keep reminding ourselves that John's visions are not descriptions of what he sees with his eyes. He is sharing what he has come to see with his mind and heart as he was inspired to penetrate to the ultimate meaning of things with his intelligence enlightened by faith. He invites the assembled community to see what he has seen: 'I looked, and there (look!)' (see 1:7). He draws their attention firstly to the fact that the divine transcendent reality is not closed to them: Christ has opened the door of heaven. He has gone through to full communion with God, and, through the open door he can communicate from God to us, and we can communicate to God through him.

Apocalypse 4:1 [modelled on Ezekiel 1:1ff]

1. Jesus reveals God's purpose

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet [1:10] said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'

The voice that speaks like a trumpet is that which spoke to him earlier (1:10). It is the voice of Christ himself, mediated through the angel, as in all apocalyptic works. The risen Christ is about to reveal to him the meaning of history and the ultimate destiny of mankind. He is about to reveal to him the way God judges things to be, and so what ultimately matters.

Apocalypse 4:2

2. God's throne and the Saints

At once I was in the Spirit

John speaks of himself as being **in the Spirit**. What he has come to understand and what he is about to share is the fruit of prayer and the gift of Christ's own Spirit.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day

and I heard behind me [unexpected] **a loud** [powerful] **voice** [intelligible]
like a trumpet saying,

“Write in a book [fixed, dependable]

what you see [insight in the Spirit] ‘ (Apocalypse 1:10)

Apocalypse 4:2-3

There in heaven stood a **throne**, and One seated on the throne!
And the one seated there looked like jasper and carnelian, and
around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald.

The **throne** is the centre of power in a kingdom. God is said to be seated there, for, whatever the appearances, it is God who is the Lord of history and who is in possession of the kingdom. John focuses on the throne here for his interest is in God's action in history, and in the establishment of God's reign through the action of Christ. The beauty of heaven, captured with the images of precious stones and the rainbow, with sparkling flashes of red, yellow and green light.



Exodus 24:9-11

‘Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up the mountain, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was **something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.** God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.’

Apocalypse 4:4

2. God's throne and the Saints

Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, clad in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads.

There are twenty-four thrones for those who belong to the twelve tribes of Israel along with those who are followers of the twelve apostles of Christ (see 21:12,14) [12 = heavenly fullness : zodiac]. They are clothed in white, for they participate in the luminous radiance of the risen Christ (see 1:14). The effective power of God in history is shared by the saints of the Old and New Testaments, who have achieved victory in their lives and now participate in God's glory – hence the golden crowns on their heads. Crowns, because they share in the victory of Jesus over all that is evil (see 2:10). Golden, because it is communion with God that they are enjoying (see 1:13).

Apocalypse 4:5

3. Mysterious ways in which creation experiences the divine

Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God.

John is contrasting the worship of the true God with the imperial cult. In place of the cult priests there are the priestly people of the new Jerusalem (the twenty-four elders; see 4:4); in place of the sun and moon and the five known planets, there are the seven spirits of God (see 1:4). In place of the patronage of Zeus, the God of thunder and lightning, there is the constant communication coming from the throne of God.

Apocalypse 4:5

3. Mysterious ways in which creation experiences the divine

Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God.

The communication is enlightening (hence ‘flashes of lightning’).

It is intelligible and so meant to be understood (hence ‘voices’; see 1:10).

However, it transcends human comprehension (hence ‘peals of thunder’).

The flaming torches remind us of Jesus’ mission: to baptise ‘with the Holy Spirit and fire’(Matthew 3:11).

Apocalypse 4:6

In front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

The Jews were a land people, unlike their northern neighbours, the Phoenicians. In Jewish literature, the sea is a symbol of chaos, representing the environment over which humans have no control and in which they venture at their own risk. Chaos is excluded from heaven. The only 'sea' in heaven, therefore, is of crystal, adding beautifully to the translucent splendour surrounding God.

Apocalypse 4:6-8

3. Mysterious ways in which creation experiences the divine

In the midst of the throne, and round the throne, are four animal-like creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with a face like a human face, and the fourth like an eagle. And the four animal-like creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside.

Ezekiel 1:4-5, 10

‘As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form ... the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle.’

Apocalypse 4:6-8 (see Ezekiel)

3. Mysterious ways in which creation experiences the divine

In the midst of the throne, and round the throne, are four animal-like creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with a face like a human face, and the fourth like an eagle. And the four animal-like creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside.

The four animal-like creatures replace the creatures of the zodiac of Babylonian astrology. They symbolise the ways in which divine activity is manifested throughout the whole of earthly reality (hence 'four', for the four points of the compass). Because these ways are partly incomprehensible they are represented as animal. One might speak of the ways in which the transcendent is immanent in creation or of the many mysterious ways in which we are moved by religious experience. The lion symbolises power; the ox, fecundity; man, reason and love; and the eagle, movement.

Apocalypse 4:8-11

Day and night without ceasing the **four animal-like creatures** (4:6-8) sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.' And whenever they give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the **twenty-four elders** (4:4) fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.'

God is immanent in the whole of creation which is caught up in a cosmic hymn of praise, echoed by the saints, the members of the Christian community, made holy because of their union with Jesus.

Apocalypse 4:8-11

The Christians of Asia are tempted to throw in their lot with those who fall down in worship of the Roman state and the benefits it brings to those willing to comply with its rule.

True worship, says John, is to be offered only to the true God, the God of Jesus, the Creator.

The prayer of David

‘Blessed are you, Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all’(1 Chronicles 29:10-12).

Apocalypse 5:1

4. The Crucified and Risen Jesus

Then I saw in the **right** hand of the one seated on the throne a **scroll** written on the inside and on the back, sealed with **seven seals**.

Ezekiel 2:9-10

‘I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back.’

Daniel 12:4

Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end.

The **scroll** represents the whole of history. There are no gaps, no empty spaces: it is ‘written on the inside and on the back’. It is in God’s **right hand** (see 1:16), for history reveals the power of God. However, it seems that the meaning of history is to remain forever hidden, a completely closed book: ‘**sealed with seven seals**’.

Apocalypse 5:2-5

I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to **open the scroll** and break its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not **Weep** not. See, the **Lion of the tribe of Judah**, the **Root of David**, has conquered. He can open the scroll and its seven seals’.

John’s disappointment is relieved when it is revealed to him that the crucified and exalted Christ knows the mind of God. History has reached its end, its goal, in Christ. He has revealed the meaning of history by showing us who God really is and how God has chosen to reveal himself to us in history. He has also revealed what it is truly like to be human and how we are to live so as to enjoy the fullness of divine communion.

Apocalypse 4:5

One of the elders said to me, 'Do not Weep not.
See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,
the Root of David, has conquered.'

'Judah crouches down, stretches out like a lion ... The sceptre shall not depart from Judah ... until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his'(Genesis 49:9-10).

That day, the root of Jesse (David's father) shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious'(Isaiah 11:10).

Apocalypse 5:6

In the midst of the throne and the four living things and in the midst of the elders, I saw a Lamb standing as having been slaughtered [Crucified & Risen Christ, 1st of 28 times], having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.



At the centre of divine action in the world ('in the midst of the throne'), of religious experience ('the four living things'), and of the communion of those united to Jesus ('the elders'), stands the crucified and risen Christ.

The power of the Roman empire is based on military conquest and the injustice of controlled trade. The power of God is the power of love, and the Christian community is called to follow one who is symbolised by a lamb. In terms of the power exercised in this world, he was a victim (he was slaughtered). But he conquered death and now stands as the one through whom all God's creative and redeeming love is poured out on the world.

Apocalypse 5:6

In the midst of the throne and the four living things and in the midst of the elders, I saw a Lamb standing as having been slaughtered [Crucified & Risen Christ, 1st of 28 times], having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

The Paschal Lamb whose blood saved the Israelites from death on the day of their redemption from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 12).

The suffering servant of God who offered his life for the people: 'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter'(Isaiah 53:7).

Two Christian adaptations of Jewish inter-testamentary writings.

‘And I saw that a virgin was born from Judah, wearing a linen stole; and from her was born a spotless lamb. At his left there was something like a lion, and all the wild animals rushed against him, but the lamb conquered them ... Honour Levi and Judah, because from their seed will arise the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world, and will save all the nations, as well as Israel.’

(The Testament of Joseph, 19:8,11).

‘Through you will be fulfilled the heavenly prophecy concerning the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world, because the unspotted one will be betrayed by the lawless, and the sinless one will die for the impious by the blood of the covenant for the salvation of the gentiles and of Israel’ (The Testament of Benjamin, 3:8).

5. Christ will reveal the meaning of history : Apocalypse 5:7-10

He went and has received the scroll from the **right** hand of the One who was seated on the throne. And when he took the scroll, the four living things and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and **golden basins** [the sprinkling basins containing the blood of sacrifice] **full of incense**, which are the prayers of the saints.

They sing a **new song**: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from **every tribe and language and people and nation** [‘Catholic’]; you have made them to be a **kingdom and priests** [1:6] serving our God, and they reign on earth’.

Apocalypse 5:11-14 : Heavenly liturgy

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living things and the elders. They numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands [Daniel 7:10], singing with full voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might [exercise of power] and honour and glory and blessing!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!’ And the four animal-like creatures said ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshipped.

In the light of these ultimate truths, he now turns to focus on the meaning of what is happening in his world as revealed by Jesus.



SCENE 2 : Six seals are broken 6:1-17

Only the Crucified and Risen Christ [the Lamb] can break the seven seals and disclose the meaning of history (5:5)

Seals 1-4
6:1-8
Nature

The just
are secure
with God (7)

Seal 7

‘When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour’(8:1)

Seals 5-6
6:9-17
History

God’s judgment is proclaimed in 7 stages
– 7 Trumpets (8:2)

Apocalypse 6:1-2

Then I saw when the **Lamb** [5:6] opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four animal-like creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, 'Come!' I looked, and there was a **white** [1:14] horse! Its rider had a bow; a **crown** was given to him, and he came forth from **victory** that he **might** conquer.

John is drawing on Zechariah 6:1-7 who uses different coloured horses symbolically to represent the different ways in which God's judgment is brought to bear on history.

Zechariah 6:1-7

And again I looked up and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains – mountains of bronze. The first chariot had **red horses**, the second chariot **black horses**, the third chariot **white horses**, and the fourth chariot **dappled gray** horses. Then I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” The angel answered me, “These are the four winds of heaven going out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth.

The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go toward the west country, and the dappled ones go toward the south country.” When the steeds came out, they were impatient to get off and patrol the earth. And he said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth.

Apocalypse 6:1-2

Then I saw when the **Lamb** [5:6] opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four animal-like creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, 'Come!' I looked, and there was a **white** [1:14] horse! Its rider had a bow; a **crown** was given to him, and he came forth from **victory** that he **might** conquer.

his **head** and his hair were **white** as white wool, white as snow;

his **eyes** were like a flame of fire,

his **feet** were like brass, refined as in a furnace,

and his **voice** was like the sound of many waters

In his **right hand** he held seven stars, and

from his **mouth** came a sharp, **two-edged sword** [Hebrews 4:12-13]

and his **face** was like the sun shining with full splendour.

The **white** horse stands for the dominant influence of Christ in history. He has come from the victory of his resurrection, and, whatever other forces are at work in history - forces that cause the catastrophes symbolised by the other three horses - his is the dominant force. He has conquered and is still victorious. No power can overcome him.

Apocalypse 6:3-4

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second animal-like creature call out, 'Come!' And out came another horse, fiery red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.

The second horse is red, symbolic of war and bloodshed, the violence that underpins Roman rule. The causes of war are to be sought in human injustice. But John, following the prophetic tradition, looks beyond the empirical data of our human experience to the truth that God can bring good even out of the sinful reality of war. This raises the complex question of punishment for sin, and its relationship to the divine will. We shall return to this question shortly. Here John recognises that, while the cause of war is to be found in human sin, it is not outside the influence of divine providence.

Apocalypse 6:5-6

When he opened the **third** seal, I heard the third animal-like creature call out, 'Come!' I looked, and there was a **black horse** [famine]! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living things saying, 'A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of **barley** for a day's pay; but do not harm the **olive oil** and the **wine**!'

The third horse is **black**. The rider carries **scales** and has the power to organise prices in such a way as to keep the poor in a state of oppression. In 92AD Domitian restricted produce in the provinces! The poor cannot afford wheat and have to be content with the less nourishing barley. At the same time those who control exchange make sure that the rich can enjoy luxury items (**oil and wine**) to their heart's content. Roman prosperity depended, too, on the manipulation of markets. Such blatant injustice is frequently the subject of condemnation by the prophets.

Amos 8:4-6

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying:
'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will practice deceit with false scales,
buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.'

Apocalypse 6:7-8

When he opened the **fourth seal**, I heard the voice of the fourth living thing call out, 'Come!' I looked and there was a **pale green** horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.

The pale green of the fourth horse symbolises the fading of life, and so mortality, reminding us of the passage of Isaiah 40:6. 'All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it.'

The red, black and fading green horses and their riders symbolise the terrors of war, injustice, and death upon which the apparent wealth and security of the Roman empire (including that of the subject cities of Asia) rested.

When he opened the **fifth** seal, I saw under the **altar** [sacrifice], alive, those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, ‘Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’ They were each given a **white robe** and told to rest a **short time** [not chronological, but certain; see 1:1 & Luke 18:7-8 – the widow will get justice soon], **until** the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

With the opening of the fifth seal, John shifts his focus to God’s vindication of the martyrs who have made the supreme sacrifice (**‘altar’**), but are alive, and share the life of the risen Christ (**‘white robes’**). Their vindication is certain (**‘short time’**)

Apocalypse 6:12-14

When he opened the **sixth** seal, I looked, and there came

1. **a great earthquake** [Sardis 17AD; Laodicea 60AD];

[anything on which we depend that is not God must collapse]

2. **the sun became black as sackcloth**, [no light except from Christ]

3. **the full moon became like blood**, [imperial cult brings only violence]

‘The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood,
at the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord’(Joel 2:31).

4. **the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its
winter fruit when shaken by a gale**, [fall of power that claims divinity]

5. **the sky was made to vanish like a scroll rolling itself up,**

[everything is open to divine scrutiny and justice]

6&7. **every mountain and island was removed from its place.**

[no escape, nowhere to hide]

Apocalypse 6:15-17

Then the kings of the earth [1:5] [1], and the magnates [2]
and the generals [3] and the rich [4] and the powerful [5],
and everyone, slave [6] and free [7],
hid 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
the One seated on the throne and from the **wrath of the Lamb**;
[Christ shares in God's passionate concern to see injustice defeated]
for the great day of **their wrath** has come, and who is able to stand?'

That God's judgment is universal is symbolised by the seven groups mentioned by John.

'They (the idolaters) shall say to the mountains, Cover us!
and to the hills, Fall on us!' (Hosea 10:8 = Luke 23:30).

The wrath of God! The wrath of the Lamb! (next slide)

The wrath of God! The wrath of the Lamb!

‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8). God is ‘the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, persistent in passionate concern, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Exodus 34:6). Everything we know about God must be understood from this basic perspective. When we say that God is just we recognise that God’s will is always loving, that everything God does gives expression to this love, and that God’s love is offered unconditionally. The implication is that nothing we do can change this fact: a truth which the cross powerfully symbolises.

We come to the enigma of sin, to the fact that we humans use our limited freedom to act in ways that attempt to satisfy a more superficial need by frustrating a more central one. We act against nature, against right order, against God’s will. We withdraw ourselves from what we most long for and need: God’s unconditional love. We act unjustly.

The injustice committed in our world has evil effects on the people acting unjustly and on those whom their actions affect. Clearly, it matters how we behave. Furthermore, the truth that God is love in no way distorts God's judgment. We might deceive ourselves. We cannot deceive God. If we are acting unjustly, that is the way God sees it and God cannot pretend things are otherwise.

If we reject God's love, if we turn our back on God's wisdom and God's will, and act unjustly, we reject his offered love and certain consequences follow.

The Bible tends to look on the effects of sin as 'punishment', but it is important to recognise that the punishment is, in the final analysis, self-inflicted. Jeremiah 2:19 - 'Your wickedness will punish you, and your apostasies will convict you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God.'

Sin has its evil effects, and while the sin lasts so do its effects. But God's unconditional love stands.

God uses the punishment as an instrument to draw the sinner back to his love. If the sinner refuses this offer, he has only himself to blame.

The expression 'Day of the Lord' is used in the Old Testament for any time in which things are revealed in their true light: any time when the judgment of God is manifest. From the point of view of the vindication of the just and the punishment of the unjust, such a day is called a 'day of wrath'.

Christ shares in God's passionate concern for justice. The 'great day of their wrath' (6:17) is therefore truly a day of the 'wrath of the Lamb' (6:16). He forgave those who crucified him, and he is willing to forgive all who cause oppression. But we must accept this offer. We must cease from our oppression. We must turn to God and be saved. If not, God's just judgment must be revealed, when we will reap the fruit of our actions.

Six seals have been broken. There is, however, still one seal preventing us from penetrating to a full understanding of the meaning of history.

So far we have been told that we cannot understand it unless we grasp the truth that the effects of evil (seals two, three and four) are transcended by the influence of the exalted Christ (seal one).

We must also realise that the passionate concern of God for truth means that the cry of the martyrs will certainly be heard (seal five) and that evil will be conquered (seal six).

Before breaking the final seal, and with his focus still upon history, John reassures his readers that those consecrated to Christ need have no fear.

INTERLUDE : The just are safe from divine judgment

Apocalypse 7:1

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

There are four angels in this scene. Four symbolises the whole extent of earthly reality (see 4:6). Angels symbolise divine activity coming into the world from the transcendent (see 1:20). The fact that they are presented as ‘**standing**’ symbolises that divine judgment is about to be delivered, but is, for the present being held back.

That John is referring to the present situation on earth is underlined when, in place of the traditional expression ‘the four winds of the heavens’, he speaks of the ‘**four winds of the earth**’

INTERLUDE : The just are safe from divine judgment

Apocalypse 7:2-3

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, 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**'.

God is portrayed as holding judgment back, that is to say, of patiently living with the terrible effects of the evil being perpetrated on the earth, till those who are faithful disciples of his Son receive his seal upon their foreheads (compare Ezekiel 9:4). This seal indicates that they have given themselves, like slaves, body and soul, heart and mind, to God's service. They belong to God and God will protect them against evil.

Apocalypse 7:4-8

I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144 thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel: from the tribe of Judah 12,000 sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000 , from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000 sealed.

‘Thousand’ = largest unit. ‘Twelve’ = heavenly totality (Zodiac)

144 = 12x12 [The ‘Israel of God’, Galatians 6:16 - Jews and Gentiles complete]

The message of divine protection and the seal to ensure it come ‘**from the rising of the sun**’ (7:2), that is, from the east, from the risen Christ, their source of hope. Luke uses this imagery to introduce the birth of Christ:

‘By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace’(Luke 1:78-79).