

DISCOVERY – SELECTION – SEALING

Introduction

John's Revelation is filled with provocative messages. One important challenge is deciphering the **order** of events in those missives: "What is the **sequence** of those episodes?" In turn, "Might some of these incidents be preliminary signs or waymarks, asserting that we are approaching the time of earth's last hour, when the fate of all will have been determined?"

Two of those interesting communiques are the sealing of the 144,000 (Revelation 7) and the measuring of the temple, altar and worshipers (Revelation 11:1). These are judicial events on those living at earth's final period.

- God will **measure** (by some standard) His church (those calling themselves Christian), its leaders and worshipers. That Greek word is **metreo** – meaning "to measure out or judge."¹
- God is going to **seal** his saints at a specific period of time, forever securing their eternal salvation.

How can we understand those solemn issues? A logical assumption might be: "One can't be sealed unless they meet a divine standard. That, in turn, must be determined by some judicial review." Might there be a point in time when that "discovery" is complete, the selective process ends and the last chance to repent is passed? A notice Paul gave to the Corinthians is instructive:

- *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; **that every one may receive** the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be **good or bad**"* (II Corinthians 5:10). That's discovery time.
- There is a good and a bad – thus, a **standard**; there is a **judgment** – thus, a review; there is an outcome – thus, a **sentence**; *there is an **end**, thus the sealing*. This means that there will be, at some point, a "divine decision" that encompasses eternity.

A distinction between two groups is also noted in Revelation 6 and 7. When the sixth Seal is opened (Revelation 6:12-16), the day of God's wrath occurs (vs 17). That relates to the time alluded to in Matthew 24:29-31 and Revelation 15 and 16 (especially 16:17-21).

- It is when a time of great tribulation, earthquakes and signs in the sky come – and when the wicked call for the rocks and mountains to fall on them to hide them from the *"face of Him that sits on the throne"* (6:16).
- Those lost individuals finally cry out in horror, *"Who can stand in the day of His wrath?"* (6:17).

The answer comes in Revelation 7. These will stand/survive:

¹ *Thayer Lexicon.*

1. A holy and victorious remnant, who are sealed (7:1-8) – the 144,000.
2. Then they are glorified in God’s kingdom (7:9-17)² – seen as a “*great multitude*.”
3. Contextually, both groups are the same individuals.³

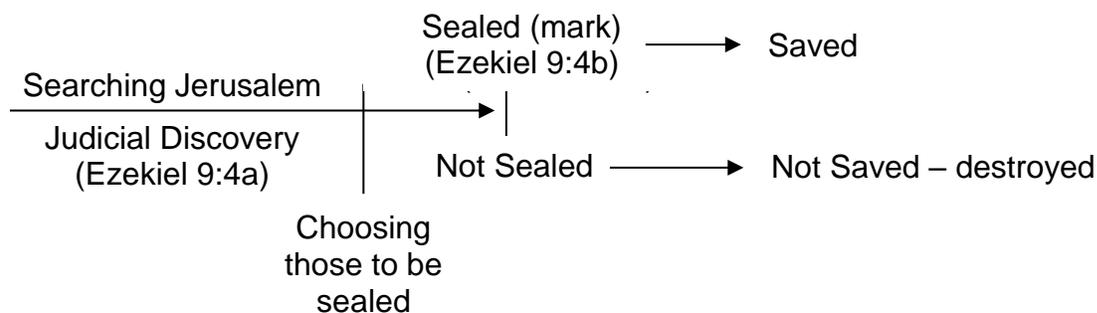
There are clearly two “extremes” at the end of time: one group that is subject to God’s wrath and one that enjoys being in God’s presence.

Standards for Sealing

For God to seal a person as an ***eternal citizen of His kingdom***, there are qualifications to be identified as forever worthy (cf. Revelation 3:7-13: the Philadelphia church members who are sealed).

A useful illustration comes from Ezekiel 9. A seal was placed on the foreheads of God’s servants to exempt them from His judicial wrath (9:4).

- That mark or seal by a “scribe” was placed on an eligible person identified from his scouring the city of Jerusalem.⁴ (In prophecy this city ideally represents the “people of God” – there, it is filled with the good and the bad.)
- There was first a period of judicial discovery – looking throughout the city.
- Then there is a selection – “He has chosen us” (II Thessalonians 2:13).
- Then the mark was placed on all those “*who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it*” (Ezekiel 9:4 – NRS). Graphically:



The word there for “*abominations*” is plural. Those “sins” were discussed in the previous chapter (Ezekiel 8). Those sealed resisted those abominations.

1. Worship of a false god at the north gate of the outer court (where the sacrificial animals entered) that displaced heaven’s Messianic sacrifice for mankind

² LaRondelle, Hans K., Th.D.; *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (First Impressions; Sarasota, FL 34243 – 1997), p. 150.

³ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), p. 265.

⁴ Block, Daniel I.; *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1997), p. 310.

2. Pagan practices in God's sanctuary (church), led by church leaders, representing demonic worship and spiritualism. The true God was vacated.
3. Honoring the dead in anticipation of their seasonal resurrection. Clearly, a detestable view of what occurs when a person dies.
4. Worship of the eastern sun with God's sanctuary (church) at their backs.⁵ That celestial object didn't threaten, it was quiet and brought warmth and growth of crops. Their posture, however, is a rejection of the Creator of the heavens, and obeisance to the creation.

Again, in that time of "judgment," the people **claiming** to be God's people (symbolized by the word "Jerusalem") are divided into two groups:

1. Those who have intense grief and a broken heart over the sins within the "church," sympathizing with God's perspective
2. The wicked, who are finally executed. They, by inference, are those who were most involved with those four sins that God hates. The destroying angels were to have no pity. This work of destruction was focused on those claiming Jesus Christ as their Savior but who have apostatized.

Peter alluded to this: *"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that **obey not the gospel of God?**" (I Peter 4:17 – KJV).*

Ezekiel's spiritual characteristic of those sealed relates to their ***grief response*** to sin.

- Jewish scholar Jacques B. Doukhan, uniquely focused on the fourth abomination of Ezekiel 8:15-17. He notes:
- The created, the sun, is worshiped instead of the Creator. This mocks the worship of God's seventh-day Sabbath, which is to honor the "Creator of the heavens and the earth" (Exodus 20:8-11).⁶

Other characteristics that identify those who survive the great tribulation and are thus sealed (Revelation 7:14) are noted in Revelation 14:1-5.

1. They sing a "***new song***" (likely the same as referenced in 5:9) that is filled with praises to the Lamb whose blood purchased their redemption. They "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (14:4b).

"Throughout the Psalms, the '***new song***' (33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1) is a hymn of praise for the fact that the God of creation ***has delivered his people*** as well as a call to the saints to put their *trust completely in him*."⁷

⁵ Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch; *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts 01961-3473; 2006 – 2nd printing), vol. 9, pp. 66-73.

⁶ Doukhan, Jacques B.; *Secrets of Revelation (The Review and Herald Publishing Association; Hagerstown, MD 21740)*, pp. 70-71.

⁷ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 527.

The 144,000 give the highest honor and loyalty to Jesus Christ, **their Savior**. Perhaps this illustrates partly why they worship as a heavenly choir.⁸

2. The symbolism that they have not been defiled but are virgins, means that the saints have not compromised their lives with the world but have remained loyal as an engaged virgin bride to God (cf. II Corinthians 11:2-4, 13-15).⁹
3. In a **chiastic tie** within Revelation 14:1-5, verse 12 elevates another characteristic of the 144,000 – those translated after the great tribulation.
 - They are with Jesus the “*Lamb*” – and are without fault before God (verses 1-5).
 - Why are the views of God this way? “*Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus*” (verse 12). That is a judicial conclusion related to these individuals.
4. They are pure in their words. Their honesty and integrity are honorable to God (cf. Isaiah 53:9, Zephaniah 3:13). They have an absolute commitment to Him in their witness.¹⁰

Through inspiration God summarizes those sealed as having these characteristics:

- Emotional hatred against sin
- Worship the only true God
- Detest demonic worship – spiritualism
- Despise those who defy honor to the Creator
- Have a correct perspective of death
- Support God’s justice
- Will be in a heavenly choir
- Fully trust God and follow Christ
- Keep God’s commandments
- Are patient and honest
- Have pure words in speech

The Supreme Judge – Jesus

In an earlier chapter of Revelation, Jesus is described by the wondering John.

- “*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), pp. 737-741.

¹⁰ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 531.

went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:13-16).

- Christ’s eyes of fire (cf. 19:12) are a metaphor for judgment (cf. 2:18-23). This is similar to Daniel’s vision in 10:6: “his eyes as lamps of fire.” He is seen as the great “Discoverer.”
- He is constantly aware of the spiritual condition of His people in the churches, warning and counseling how to rectify what is at variance with holiness.

There is something unique to this prophetic imagery of Christ. **He is willing to share what He sees as remedial issues that would impede eternal life.** He “discovers” things in those who have the potential to be sealed and advises them! He helps them prepare for what will be God’s final acts: sealing or destruction.

In reviewing the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, one sees His judicial observations in action!

Paulien makes a beautiful point. Jesus repeatedly says to those churches, “*I know*” relative to understanding the depth of their hearts, “there is nothing to hide any more. Thus, there is no reason why we shouldn’t confess our sins.”¹¹

Jesus’ Judicial Review – “Discovery Time” (Revelation 2 and 3) – His “I know”

These relate not only to those churches but to their individuals!

1. Left your first love, fallen (Ephesus – 2:4-5)
2. No complaints (Smyrna – 2:8-11)
3. Hold false doctrines (Pergamos – 2:14-15)
4. Interest in and loyalty to other gods, unable to take counsel well (Thyatira – 2:20-21)
5. Imperfect service (Sardis – 3:2)
6. No complaints (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Feels no deep need for Jesus (Laodicea – 3:17)

Then Jesus *exhorts and warns the churches individually* as to what corrective steps need to be taken. This is an amazing response of mercy! This parallels the appeal that began with the Christian Church as the apostles went out pleading for repentance. Set aside sin, repent and cling to God–Jesus’ saving grace. This dual appeal does not cease till His work is done. Here, in the message to five of the seven churches, we find a pleading Jesus with an urgent command to cease what is displeasing Him.

1. Repent, remember the spiritual heights of the past (Ephesus – 2:5)
2. No corrective advice (Smyrna – 2:8-11)
3. Repent (Pergamos – 2:16)

¹¹ Paulien, *op. cit.*

4. Repent (she didn't) (Thyatira – 2:23)
5. Repent (Sardis – 3:3)
6. No corrective advice (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Repent, be zealous (Laodicea – 3:19)

“If the warnings which God has given are neglected or regarded with indifference, if you cherish or excuse sin, you are sealing your soul's destiny; you will be weighed in the balances and found wanting. Grace, peace, and pardon will be withdrawn forever; Jesus will have passed by, never again to come within the reach of your prayers and entreaties. While mercy still lingers, while Jesus is making intercession for us, let us make thorough work for eternity.”¹²

“Time is passing. Christ speaks to your individual hearts, as he spoke to Philip, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?’ But thank God it is not yet too late to repent. Mercy still lingers. Will you, in this your day, heed the words of invitation and mercy? Will you know the things which belong unto your peace? The gracious invitation is still sounding. The things which belong unto your peace are still presented to you for acceptance.”¹³

Then Jesus, in this discovery time, gives specific things He wants the congregations to do. He has *special issues*.

1. Do your first works, have the same excitement you had when you first gave your heart to Me (Ephesus – 2:5)
2. Fear not poverty, trials, prison or persecution (Smyrna – 2:10)
3. No special message (Pergamos – 2:12-17)
4. Hold fast till I come, keep my works (Thyatira – 2:25-26)
5. Be watchful, strengthen the things which remain that are about to die, remember what you have had in the past and hold onto it (Sardis – 3:2-3)
6. No special message (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Buy gold, white raiment and eyesalve (Laodicea – 3:18)

In God's final appeal, before the mark, seal or the sword, there are great contrasts drawn between problems and promises. It is God finally saying, “Look what is eternally before you. See what will befall you if you turn away from me.”

Before the Revelation 7 sealing prophecy is fulfilled, enticing rewards are given by Jesus in anticipation of the saints standing around God's throne (Revelation 7:13-17).

Those Chosen – Then Sealed

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| “A. Revelation 2:7 | Overcomer – promised Tree of Life |
| B. Revelation 2:11 | Overcomer – (1) crown of life, (2) no second death |

¹² White, Ellen G.; *The Home Missionary*, November 1, 1893.

¹³ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1897.

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| C. Revelation 2:17 | Overcomer – (1) hidden manna, (2) white stone, (3) new name |
| D. Revelation 2:18 | Overcomer – (1) authority over nations, (2) rule over these with iron scepter, (3) morning star |
| E. Revelation 3:1 | Overcomer – (1) walk with Jesus, (2) dressed in white, (3) not blot names out of book of life, (4) acknowledge name before Father, (5) acknowledge name Before angels |
| F. Revelation 3:7 | Overcomer – (1) kept in the hour of trial, (2) pillar in temple, (3) will never leave it, (4) name God writes on them, (5) name of city of God, (6) God’s new name |
| G. Revelation 3:14 | Overcomer – promises include all 21 previous promises, ‘sit with Jesus on throne’ ¹⁴ |

The Timing of that Judicial Review

As Revelation 1 moves forward through many introductory messages, the imagery of Christ comes into John’s view among seven lampstands, collectively a symbol of the Christian church. Christ is seen as in the ***middle*** of those churches as:

1. A priest – by His dress
2. A king – by His sash
3. A judge – by His eyes

Those eyes are emphasized in the Thyatira church (2:18) and, later, in the picture of Christ coming to judge His enemies (19:12).

- Nothing remains hidden from Christ.
- The moral state of the churches, as noted, is the outcome of heaven’s “discovery process.”
- His counsel comes at a time of grace. It is for us today.

Those eyes of flaming fire are a symbol of merciful discovery, but in anticipation of a sentence and then punishment unless changes are made.¹⁵

When is that final time of judicial warning before executive judgment? It is at the Feast of Trumpets, when the last chance comes. Those ten days before the Day of Atonement are ***called “days of awe.”*** It is a solemn time, a final time, to make all things right with God.

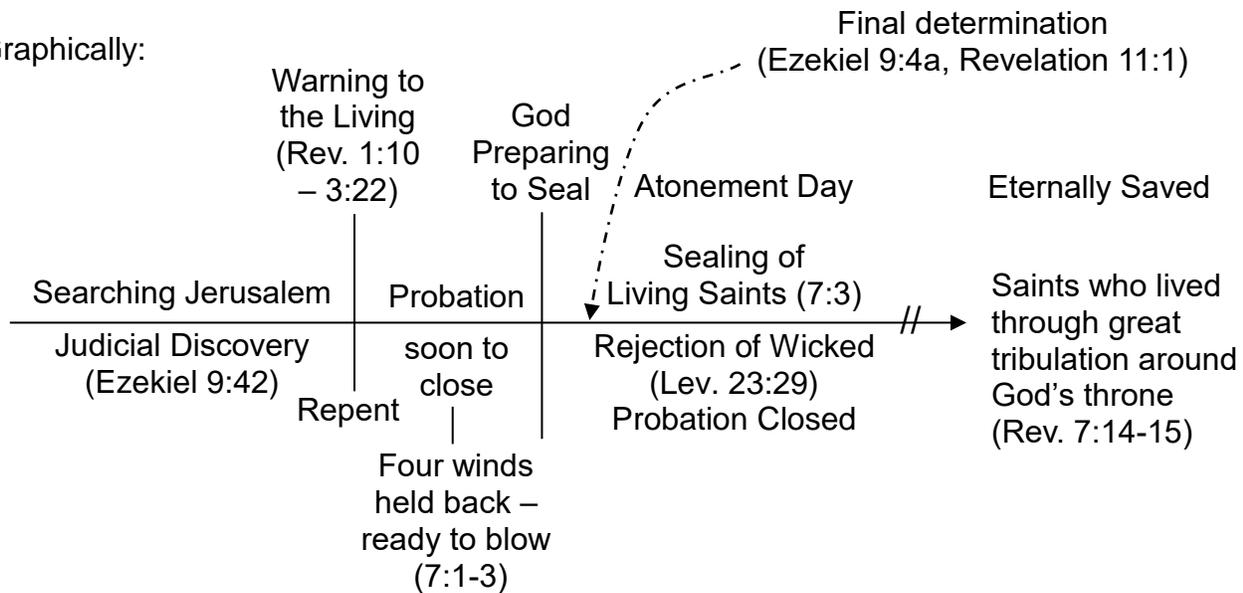
- Stunning – that Feast always begins at a new moon, on Tishri 1.
- Tishri 1, regardless of the day of the week, is always called a Sabbath.

¹⁴ Paulien, Jon, Ph.D.; *Seven Churches and a Heavenly Vision, The Bible Explorer Series* recording tapes, tape 3 (The Ambassador Group, Harrisburg, PA; 1996).

¹⁵ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

John states that he was “*in the spirit on the Lord’s day.*” Though many assumptions abound as to what this means, contextually, this observational warning begins in the fall of the year (the Hebrew month of Tishri, when the early rain begins). Revelation 4:1-5 suggests that a Day of Atonement follows.

Graphically:



Can this sequence be refined?

- “*And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein*” (Revelation 11:1).
- In the Old Testament the metaphor of “measuring” had two distinct meanings:
 1. Protection (Jeremiah 31:38-40, Ezekiel 29:6 LXX, Zechariah 1:16).
 2. Judgment (II Samuel 8:2, II Kings 21:13, Lamentations 2:8, Isaiah 28:16-17, Amos 7:7-9).¹⁶
- The former provides for a cordon off, or separation out, of God’s true people. Therefore, they are protected. The latter, the measuring, guarantees membership in the heavenly spiritual temple.

This “measuring reed” was symbolically different from the Hebrew expression, “a line has gone out” or “a line surrounds.” It is a distinct “measuring” tool, a standard.

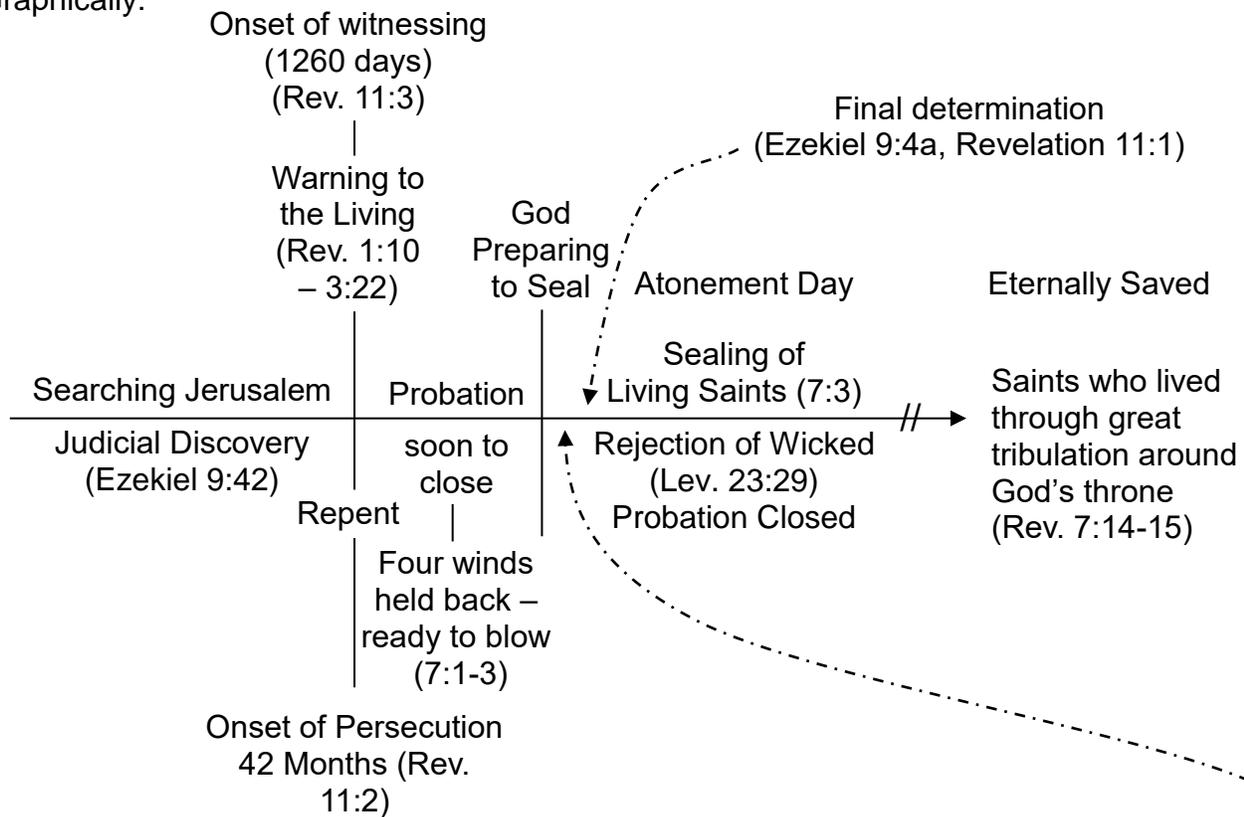
- The Greek word *metreo* (measure) figuratively means to evaluate or measure.
- It relates to God’s final judicial evaluative work at the end of time (cf. Matthew 7:2, Mark 4:24).¹⁷

¹⁶ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 559.

¹⁷ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), p. 335.

There is a group of individuals who are “validated” to be God’s witnesses (subsequent verses), who will suffer persecution. They are identified as people who will represent God, in spite of severe trials. They will be supremely successful (Revelation 11:7a).

Graphically:



1. The people of God are identified as oriented to heaven. But – there is another step that must occur before they are sealed for eternity. Those who appear to have allegiance to God must be finally put under severe test or trial. This is called “*the hour of temptation*” in the Philadelphia church (Revelation 3:10).

“This is the test that the people of God must have before they are sealed. All who prove their loyalty to God by observing His law, ... will rank under the banner of the Lord God Jehovah, and will receive the seal of the living God.”¹⁸

- “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (I Peter 4:12 – NIV).
- “These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (I Peter 1:7 – NET).

2. “Such will be the experience of God's people in their **final struggle** with the powers of evil. **God will test their faith**, their perseverance, their confidence in His power to deliver them.... Their faith will not fail because their prayers are not immediately answered. They will lay hold of the strength of God, as Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and the language of their souls will be, ‘I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.’”¹⁹

¹⁸ White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, p. 15.

¹⁹ White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 202.

Then the Sealing

The prophecy suggests a “journey” that leads to the sealing of the saints. There are defined steps, for which (when successfully traversed) God concludes with that seal, eternally solidifying their characters.²⁰

- Though a different study, this seal is the opposite of the “mark of the beast.”
- One assures eternal life, the other eternal damnation.

The seal is a sign of divine protection. This is made explicit in Revelation 9:4, which shows that forehead insignia protects them from the fifth Trumpet plague.²¹

The sequence of end-time events encompasses crucial personal commitment to God and Christ. The “purity” that comes from the final “*refiner’s fire*” becomes a signal to seal that saint.

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EndTime Issues..., Number 222, February 7, 2019

²⁰ LaRondelle, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

²¹ Aune, *op. cit.*, pp. 455-456.