

End Times Prophecy 314: Sealed and Unsealed



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Brian K. McPherson and Scott McPherson

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Sealed and Unsealed in Prophecy

Summary

Concerning the terms “sealed” and “unsealed” with regard to prophecy, an examination of the contrasting language in Daniel and Revelation provides the conceptual model outlined here. As will be noted throughout this exploratory discussion, other models seem unable to account for or reconcile with particular factors and considerations. The components of this conceptual model are as follows.

First, there are certain books in heaven, one of which seems to be a book (or scroll) that contains information regarding future events. Certain content in this book (or perhaps set of books) has been unsealed and made available to prophets at particular points in history and at other times resealed. Furthermore, these contents seem related in some form or fashion to prophetic information contained both in symbolic visions and non-symbolic, non-visionary plain language. When resealed, the information contained in the book is not currently being divulged to mankind. This can come in several forms. For instance, some of its content may be disclosed to a particular prophet and then the book is resealed so that no additional information is made known at that time. In another setting, the future events in the book can be largely unsealed with the exception of a small, select few items that remain sealed and undisclosed. We will discuss both examples below as well as the likely reasons behind sealing or unsealing information in these ways.

Introduction to Critical Texts: Daniel and the Sealing of a Book

We can begin our examination with a critical text that comes at the end of the book of Daniel. Before we start, it is worth noting that Daniel is a book filled with many prophecies concerning the future, including visions and dreams filled with symbolic imagery, “plain language” explanations of the visionary symbols, and other “plain language” prophecies given outside the context of a symbolic vision or dream. When it comes to the proper interpretation of the term “sealed,” it is noteworthy that the particular passage below comes at the very end of the book of Daniel and during a short series of chapters spanning from 10-12 that entail plain

language prophecies, not symbolic visions or dreams. In fact, the opening verses of chapter 12 continue directly from chapter 11. For the sake of brevity, we will not include the entire passage here.

Daniel 12:1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. 2 **And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.** 3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. 4 **But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.** 5 Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. 6 And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? 7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. 8 **And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?** 9 **And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.** 10 Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. 11 And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. 12 Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. 13 **But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.**

Verse 4 contains the initial iteration of the critical phrase, “thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end.” We see a similar iteration in verse 9 where Daniel is again told, “Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.” Although we will not take the time here to discuss it in depth, earlier passages and encounters in Daniel indicate that these remarks are made to Daniel by the angel Gabriel. (See Daniel 8:16 and 9:21.)

Here we will take a moment to explore two issues related to these remarks from Daniel 12:4 and 9. The first concerns the question of which book this verse is referring to. Is it referring to what Jews and Christians refer to as “the Book of Daniel?” Is it the Book of Daniel that is to be sealed up? The second issue pertains to the meaning of the phrase “shut up the words, and seal the book.” Of course, these two concepts are interrelated. Lastly, we should also note that verse 4 spells out the timeframe for how long the words of the book are shut up and the

book is sealed. Daniel is told that the words will be shut up and the book sealed “even to the time of the end.”

Perhaps the most natural interpretation of this timeframe would be to take “the end” as a reference to the final years at the end of the age before Christ returns. However, we should also consider that Daniel 9 outlines a period of weeks before the coming of the Messiah. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, Mark 1:15 records Christ declaring “the time is fulfilled.” The Septuagint Greek translation of Daniel 12:4 as well as Mark 1:15 both use the Greek word “kairos” (2540) for “time” coupled with different words that both indicate “fulfillment” or “completion.” (Daniel 12:4 uses “sunteleia,” 4930 while Mark 1:15 uses “pleroo,” 4137.) Consequently, in addition to the book remaining sealed until Christ’s return, it is also possible that Daniel 12:4 is simply indicating that the sealing will remain until the first coming of the Messiah.

With regard to our two questions, one fact is clear. The Book of Daniel itself was not sealed or shut up until the time of the end. It was known to the Jewish people and familiar to them from the time of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century AD when the book was written even down to the time of Jesus. When Jesus discusses a series of events leading eventually to his return in Matthew 24:1-51 and Mark 13:1-37, both times he refers to the “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet.” (See Matthew 24:14, Mark 13:14.) Jesus mentions this detail from Daniel without further explanation, knowing his audience would have at least a basic familiarity with Daniel’s writings. In fact, both Matthew and Mark themselves take a moment to place a notation regarding Jesus’ citation of Daniel. We see this reflected in the parenthetical comment in the English translation of both verses. In Matthew 24, the entirety of verse 15 is “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand.)” In other words, not only did Jesus assume his audience would know about Daniel’s writings, but Matthew and Mark themselves assumed that Daniel’s book was available for their audience to examine and contemplate.

Moreover, as noted earlier a significant portion of the prophetic information in the book of Daniel is given in plain language, both in terms of plain language that explains the symbols found in the visions and also plain language that records prophecies given without any direct connection to a symbolic vision or dream.

These facts have strong implications regarding what is meant by the sealing and shutting up of the book in Daniel 12:4 and 9.

First, regarding the meaning of the term “sealed,” it could be theorized that “sealing” has to do with veiling the meaning of prophecy in symbolism. However, the fact that even Daniel’s symbolic visions are explained in plain language within the Book of Daniel itself disproves such a theory. There was never a period when the information in the visions remained veiled in symbolism without explanation. Therefore, “sealed” must convey something other than veiling the intended meaning in symbolism.

This concept could be refined so that “sealed” refers to withholding the actual names and identities of nations or rulers depicted in both symbolic and plain language in the prophecies in the Book of Daniel. Such a refinement of the concept would allow for the meaning of symbols to be revealed as well as detailed chronicles of future political activities while the actual names of the persons and nations involved remained withheld. But, this concept would also be untenable. After all, the Book of Daniel at times does name names. There are instances when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the Babylonian kingdom itself are specifically identified in the prophetic disclosures. Persia and the Greece are also identified by name as the successors of the Babylonians. So, if the intention is to withhold the specific entities that the symbols referred to, that possibility is getting less and less likely due to the fact that Daniel elsewhere does identify the kingdoms by name. The only thing not included is the specific names of future kings and one or two future ethnic groups. However, except for references to the future antichrist in particular, the lack of specifics regarding the names of kings would seem to be rather inconsequential. Given the highly detailed nature of the information that God authorized Daniel to reveal, chapter 12’s instruction to seal or shut up require a more sufficient explanation. Sealing and shutting the book would seem to suggest that something significant such as substantial future events or developments are being withheld, not just a few specific, identifying details.

Second, it could be theorized that “sealing” and “shutting up” convey the idea of a book being kept out of circulation in some sense, as if the book would be lost then later rediscovered. However, since the Book of Daniel had been in open circulation among the Jewish nation from the time of its writing, Daniel 12:4 and 9 cannot be referring to the Book of Daniel itself. The verse must be referring to the sealing of some other book.

To explain these details from Daniel 12:4 and 9, we must consider that the angel here is referring to some other book and that the sealing of this other book does not relate to merely shrouding its information in symbolic form or withholding the names of a few rulers about whom we are already given ample information with which to identify them as the prophecies begin to be fulfilled.

Finally, there is one other point that should be made regarding the instruction in verses 4 and 9 to seal and shut up the book. The first statement in verse 4 comes immediately after the angel discusses the future resurrection of the dead. The second statement is made in verse 8 just as Daniel continues to inquire further about the future events being discussed here by the angels. These two facts suggest that the shutting and sealing of the book equates to a cessation of disclosure of additional information about the future. For as long as the book remained unsealed and opened, Daniel was told additional information. But the shutting and sealing of the book coincides with the end of disclosure to Daniel regarding future things. We will explore this basic fact in more detail later on.

Are There Books in Heaven?

Next, we will examine the idea of heavenly books in general, or in other words, books that exist in heaven.

Exodus 32:31 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. 32 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin — ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of **thy book which thou hast written.** 33 **And the LORD said unto Moses,** Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot **out of my book.**

Exodus 32:32-33 suggest the possibility of a book that exists in God's keeping. As we can see from the text, Moses is speaking in verses 31-32 and it is Moses who attests to the idea that God has written a book that appears to remain with God. And God himself affirms this fact in verse 33. Of course, it is also possible that this book is kept on earth, or that it could even be a reference to the book of the Law (or covenant) of Moses in some sense. God certainly wouldn't need to have a book in heaven in order to blot it out.

(On this point, we might mention one of our other studies, titled, "Not Only the 10 Commandments but the Whole Law Written on the Stone Tablets." In that study, we examine the two periods of 40 days that God and Moses spent in dialog up on the mountain during the Exodus journey while the people waited below. We also highlighted details from the texts of Exodus showing that the dialogues were the 'words of the covenant' and both Moses and God wrote their own, separate record of all the words spoken in those 80 days defining the covenant. There were, in effect, two copies of the dialogues, one written by Moses and one written by God in stone. Consequently, even if the book referred to here in Exodus 32 is the Book of the Law, the covenant of Moses, the possibility remains distinct that Moses is referring to the copy that was in God's keeping, not the copy that remained among the Israelites.)

Incidentally, it is worth noting that the book mentioned in Exodus is subject to change or updates by God over time. Specifically, Moses and God both affirm that God could blot out a name that was previously written in the book. Thus, the contents of the book are not static and permanent. We will see this trait in other passages below as well.

In short, here in Exodus we find the first hints of the possibility of books that remain with God or in heaven. And just as Exodus 32 mentions the idea of names being "blotted out" of God's book, Revelation itself picks up on this same idea in chapter 3.

Revelation 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and **I will not blot out his name out of the book of life,** but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation mentions this book two other places where it is referred to alternately as “the book of the Lamb.”

Revelation 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose **names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb** slain from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 21:27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but **they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.**

As implied in Exodus, this book described in Revelation appears to be an updatable list of names of men who are accepted by God in accordance with God’s covenant. This is why Revelation refers to this book as “the book of life” and contrasts the names written in it with those who are excluded from participation in God’s kingdom. (See Revelation 21:1-27 in its entire context.) Of course, this does not necessarily imply the same covenant is in operation in both passages. It is possible that the covenant of Moses was in view in Exodus but the new covenant of Jesus Christ is in view in Revelation.

Before we leave this particular topic, we should also point out that Daniel 12 itself makes a reference to a book that contains a roster of those who are counted by God among the redeemed. In this sense, there is at least a continuity from Moses to Daniel to the Apostle John regarding the existence of a book that contains the names of those accepted by God according to his covenant.

Daniel 12:1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and **at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.**

Perhaps most importantly, however is the fact that Jesus did not actually write a covenant document (or book) with the people of Israel in the same way that Moses did with the people of Israel during the Exodus. (Moses even took a census of the men who participated in that covenant in Numbers 1:1-3). Consequently, it is unlikely that the “Lamb’s book of life” is a roster that exists on earth of those in covenant with God. And by extension, given the parallels of the book mentioned in Exodus 32, it is all the more unlikely that the book mentioned in Exodus is intended as a reference to any earthbound document either.

The mention of such a book in Exodus, Daniel, and Revelation suggests that the idea of a heavenly book was one that was familiar to the Jewish people. Along those same lines, it is not surprising that we find another reference to a book in God’s keeping in the Psalms.

Psalms 56:8 **Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?**

Psalms 139:16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and **in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.**

Here we can clearly see David praying to God and referring to “thy book,” meaning, “God’s book.” The book in Psalm 56:8 appears to be an account recording David’s troubles. If Psalm 139 is understood to refer to the same book as Psalm 56, the accounts contained in this book would appear to record even minute details (such as the formation of David’s body in his mother’s womb) even when the processes that were building that body were not yet fully complete.

Our point here is not that this book mentioned by David is the same as the books mentioned in Daniel, Exodus, and Revelation. The book mentioned in Daniel 12:4 and 9 appears to contain information about the future. The books in Exodus and Revelation (and probably Daniel 12:1) appear to be updatable rosters of those accepted by God in accordance with his covenant. This book mentioned by David appears to be a record of the events of men’s lives. (Other interpretations regarding the nature and content of the book in Psalm 56 and 139 might be possible.) It is conceivable that one book is in view in both passages, but it is just as possible that there is more than one book in heaven. Later, we will cover more information that suggests the book mentioned in Daniel 12:4 is a separate book describing the future. But the essential point remains unchanged. Like Moses, Daniel, and the Apostle John, King David seemed fully convinced that God keeps books in heaven.

Now that we’ve established the scriptural attestations to the idea of books that exist in heaven, we can return to our discussion of the particular book mentioned in Daniel 12:4.

A Specific Book Describing Future Events

What we see in Daniel 12:4 and 9 are references to a particular heavenly book that contains information about the future. Incidentally, it is possible that there is a series of books regarding the future rather than a singular book, just as the bible itself is both a book and a series of books. It is also possible, but not necessary, that all details about the future are contained in this book. Conversely, perhaps only certain limited information about the future is contained within this book. What is essential is that this book at least contains details about future events related to God’s covenants with Israel and particularly major milestones along the route to the culmination and completion of those covenants.

So far, we have demonstrated that the language of Daniel 12 rules out two possibilities. The book mentioned in verses 4 and 9 is not the Book of Daniel itself. And the sealing and shutting of the book does not refer to simply veiling information about the future in symbolic language. We also noted that the shutting and sealing of the book in question coincide with a discussion of the

future resurrection of the dead and the denial of Daniel's request to know about the events being discussed. This left open the question of what book Daniel 12:4 and 9 are referring to and what shutting and sealing refer to.

We find answers to this question in Revelation, a book that is very similar to Daniel in terms of its symbolic visions and prophecies about the future. Like Daniel 12, Revelation 20 also discusses the resurrection of the dead. And like Daniel 7, Revelation 20 discusses the saints ruling with God over the world. These are just a few of the similarities, but they demonstrate that the prophetic material in both books seems to overlap regarding events at the far end of history.

More specifically, in chapter 4-6 of Revelation, we find a scene unfolding in heaven centrally concerned with a scroll that contains information about the future, including both symbolic imagery and plain language. Below is the full text from these chapters.

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: **and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.** 2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. 3 **And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.** 4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. 5 **And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.** 6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and **round about the throne, were four beasts** full of eyes before and behind. 7 **And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.** 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. 9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. **5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.** 2 **And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?** 3 **And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.** 4 **And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.** 5 And one of the elders saith unto me, **Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.** 6 And I

beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, **stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.** 7 **And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.** 8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. 9 **And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;** 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. 11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 Saying with a loud voice, **Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.** 13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. 14 And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever. **6:1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.**

First, we should avoid any confusion regarding the word “scroll” as opposed to the word “book” in Daniel 12. In ancient times, books were written on scrolls, rather than the printed stacks of paper bound in the center with hard covers on either side that we might think of today when we hear the word “book.” So, there is really no controversy here that this “scroll” in Revelation is the same type of object referred to by the English word “book” in Daniel 12. In fact, Revelation 5:7-8 refers to this “scroll” as a “book.”

Second, the narrative of Revelation 4-6 is equally emphatic that, at first, this scroll is sealed and closed. In fact, no man is able to open it and only the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, is authorized to take it, open its seals, and reveal its contents. These peculiar details line up so well with Daniel 12 that there is little reason to doubt that the Apostle John intended his audience to understand that Jesus is here opening the very book (scroll) disclosing information about future events that Daniel was told to shut and seal in Daniel 12:4 and 9.

On this point, it might give some pause to suggest that Daniel would be authorized to seal a book that Revelation depicts no man as worthy to unseal except Jesus. After all, wouldn't that imply Daniel was considered righteous enough to open the same book over 500 years before Christ? The largescale objection here is answered in general study on Calvinism, particularly the sections addressing the doctrine of Total Depravity, as well as our study titled, “In Depth Look at Redemption and the History of Mankind's Fall,” including the segment examining the gradual permeation of sin as discussed in Genesis 6 and 1

Corinthians 5 and elsewhere. These studies demonstrate that a Jewish perspective in the Old Testament did not categorically deem each and every man who ever lived as utterly filthy and sinful before God. To be sure, that does not mean a large number of men were considered sinless. Nevertheless, some men were regarded by the Jewish people as being particularly righteous in character, some of whom had sinned on occasion (such as David) but others (such as Abel) for whom the question of sin is left more open.

Here we might also pose an obvious question. Why not just explain that Daniel was deemed worthy to open the book by means of the redeeming work of the Messiah? (Of course, Jesus died and rose more than 500 years after Daniel lived and died, but even still, God's acceptance of Old Testament saints through Christ was forward-looking and retroactive. The New Testament is clear that they are not made perfect apart from New Testament Christian saints, but both made right with God through the work of Christ.) However, if the atoning work of Christ is what enables Daniel to open the sealed scroll, it would be difficult to explain why "no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth" was worthy to open and read the scroll in Revelation 5:2-4. After all, chapter 5:5-9 is clear that Jesus, the Lamb of God, had already accomplished his redeeming work through his death when this scene unfolds in Revelation 4-6. So, why weren't the multitudes who praise Jesus in verses 8-9 for redeeming them by his death able to unseal and open the book? More importantly, how could Daniel have been able to open it and read from it?

As it turns out, Daniel was considered to have exceptional righteousness in the Jewish Old Testament perspective. When we are first introduced to Daniel in scripture, we already find him described as exceptionally concerned with keeping God's commands and avoiding defilement even while forced to live in the court of a foreign king.

Daniel 1:5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. 6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego. 8 **But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.**

When the king himself appoints Daniel and his peers to eat a diet of the king's own food in verse 5, verse 8 tells us that "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." In this instance, we see Daniel's concern for keeping the dietary commands of the Law of Moses and potentially also a prohibition against consuming anything that had been offered in sacrifice to false gods. (See Ezekiel 33:25, Acts 15:19-21.) In fact, Daniel is so determined to be obedient that he even

asks to be made an exception to the king's command on this matter. The text even presents Daniel as exceeding his three Jewish peers (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah), who are themselves clearly depicted in Daniel 3 as very devout men that refuse to engage in idolatry even to the point of risking their own lives.

Daniel's status as an exceptionally righteous man is also directly attested to elsewhere in the Old Testament. In fact, God himself attests to Daniel's exceptionally righteous status.

Ezekiel 14:12 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, 13 Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: 14 **Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD. 15 If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts: 16 **Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered,** but the land shall be desolate. 17 Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it: 18 **Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves.** 19 Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: 20 **Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.****

Four times in this passage, God places Daniel on par with not only Job but also Noah in regard to righteousness. The first and last iteration of this declaration can be found in verses 14 and 20, which specifically states that God is commending these men for "their righteousness." Moreover, we can consider God's thematic point here in these four declarations. Here God is asserting that the people of Israel were so sinful and God was so determined to punish them that not even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel, and Job would be counted as sufficient to deliver the people from their sins. At first glance, this may seem like a simple assertion that the righteousness of Noah, Daniel, and Job was insufficient to provide for the deliverance of sinners. However, two things are worth noting.

First, God does not lump Noah, Daniel, or Job into the category of sinners but instead contrasts their righteousness with the sinfulness of the people of Ezekiel's day. Certainly, this speaks to Daniel's exceptionally righteous status in the eyes of the Jewish people. Second, when it comes to emphasizing God's point, God's statement works specifically because of the exceeding righteousness of Noah, Daniel, and Job. If God mentioned ordinary men of a typically sinful status or of mediocre righteous character, then the statement would not convey just how angry God was at the sinfulness of the people and how determined he was to punish

them. God's point is that he is so displeased with Israel's sins that he would not deliver them even for the sake of men of exceptional righteousness.

We might also consider the righteous status of Noah and Job, whom scripture also depicts as exceptionally righteous. Among all the sinful people on the earth at the time of the Flood, God himself says that Noah is an exception because he is righteous in God's eyes.

Genesis 6:5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. 7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. 8 **But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.** 9 These are the generations of Noah: **Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations,** and Noah walked with God... **7:1 And the LORD said** unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; **for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.**

Similarly, the opening chapter of the book of Job describes his exceptionally righteous character.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was **Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil...** 8 **And the LORD said** unto Satan, Hast thou considered **my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?**

Like Daniel, Job is known for avoiding evil. Even God himself declares that when it comes to being "perfect and upright" that "there is none like Job in the earth." Job was truly exceptionally righteous. By placing Daniel in this category alongside Noah and Job, God is affirming a clear notion in Old Testament Jewish understanding. Daniel was exceptionally righteous.

Consequently, we can deduce the following from comparing Daniel 12 to Revelation 4-6. It may be the case that Daniel was righteous enough to view a portion of the scroll that contained information about the future. However, even Daniel was not qualified or authorized to view the entire scroll. There was a limit and at a certain point as Daniel continued his inquiries regarding the future, God told him to shut the book and seal it back up. When we resume the story of this book in Revelation 4-6, John is told that "no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon." Since the text says "no man in heaven, nor on earth, neither under the earth," we know that it intends to include Daniel, who would have been in heaven at this point after the resurrection of Christ. (See Matthew 27:50-54, Ephesians 4:8.) Yet, Daniel's righteousness was still not sufficient to open the rest of the scroll and read the entire contents. In this way, Revelation presents Jesus' righteousness as exceeding even that of Noah, Daniel, and Job! Jesus alone is qualified to unseal the book

that God had Daniel seal. And this makes sense. If a man as righteous as Daniel had sealed the book and righteousness was a qualification for unsealing it, then the man who unsealed it would have to either match or exceed Daniel in righteousness. And since God limited how much of the book Daniel could view, the man who could view it all would have to exceed Daniel's righteousness as well. (We will return to this question later and provide an alternative explanation after we examine a few relevant passages from Ezekiel 1-3 and Revelation 1 and 10.)

Of course, once Jesus has opened the book and seen its contents, he is able to pass on that information to others, just as Daniel passed on the prophecies in the visions and plain language recorded in the Book of Daniel. And so, Jesus passes this information to the Apostle John, who publishes it broadly, just as the Book of Daniel had been among the Jewish people in times past.

Ezekiel, John, and the Little Book

In our review of Revelation 4-6, we examined a scene in heaven involving the following elements: the heavens opened, a Person of God seated on a throne, a rainbow about the throne, four creatures around the throne (with the faces of a man, a calf, a lion, and an eagle), a book in the hand of the Person of God who sat on the throne, and Jesus receiving the book from the hand of the Person of God who sat on the throne. We find similar, peculiar elements in the first three chapters of the book of Ezekiel: the heavens opened, four living creatures (with the faces of a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle), a Person identified as God seated on a throne, a rainbow around the throne, a book in the hand of the Person of God seated on the throne, and Ezekiel told to take the book from his hand. Notice that the text specifically describes the book as a "roll," which reflects that is, in fact, a scroll.

Ezekiel 1:1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that **the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God...5 Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures.** And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. 6 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings...10 As for the likeness of their faces, **they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle...26 And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.** 27 And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. 28 **As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the**

appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake... **2:5** And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) **yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them...** **9** And **when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein;** **10** And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. **3:1** Moreover he said unto me, **Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.** **2** So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. **3** And he said unto me, **Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.** **4** And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.

Furthermore, given these similarities to the Book of Revelation (and Daniel), it is no surprise that we find Ezekiel 2:5 describing Ezekiel's role as a prophet to Israel. And as a prophet, Ezekiel gives predictions concerning the future. As indicated in the quote below from Encyclopedia Britannica, the visions and prophecies recorded in the Book of Ezekiel include prophecies of the approaching future siege and destruction of Jerusalem, the approaching captivity and exile of the people of Judah, the future reunification of the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the future coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and the restoration of a future Temple. In short, here again we have a text concerned with predictions about the future, which also mentions a book given in conjunction with the transmission of information about the future. Based on all these consistent elements, it is reasonable to conclude that Ezekiel, like Jesus and Daniel (Ezekiel's contemporary), was allowed to view a heavenly book that contains information about the future. (It is also possible that Daniel, John, and Ezekiel did not see or read any book itself but were simply given information from a heavenly book, which contains details about the future. Or, perhaps one or more of these men did see the actual book while others simply received information from the book without seeing the book themselves.)

“Biblical Literature, Old Testament Literature, Ezekiel, Prophetic themes and actions –

The first section of the book (chapters 1–24) contains prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem... Commissioned by Yahweh to be “a watchman for the house of Israel,” **Ezekiel performed a series of symbolic acts to illustrate the impending fate of the city from which he had been banished: he placed a brick on the ground to symbolize Jerusalem's future siege, lay down on the ground, bound himself to indicate capture...** **Oracles of hope – In the third section, chapters 33–48, Ezekiel proclaimed, in oracles that have become imprinted in theological discourse and folk songs, the hope that lies in the faith that God cares for his people and will restore them to a state of wholeness. As the good shepherd, God will feed his flock and will “seek the lost,” “bring back the strayed,” “bind up the crippled,” and “strengthen the weak.” He will also “set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them.” This Davidic ruler will be a nasi (prince), the term used for a leader of the tribal**

confederacy before the inauguration of the monarchy. In chapter 37, Ezekiel had a **now-famous vision of the valley of dry bones, which refers not to resurrection from the dead but rather to the restoration of a scattered Covenant people into a single unity.** To further emphasize the restoration of the scattered people of Yahweh, **Ezekiel uttered the oracle of the two sticks joined together into one, which prophesied the re-unification of Israel and Judah as one nation.**

Chapters 38 and 39 contain a cryptic apocalyptic oracle about the invasion of an unidentified Gog of Magog. Who this Gog is has long been a matter of speculation; whoever he is, his chief characteristic is that he is the demonic person who leads the forces of evil in the final battle against the people of God. Gog and Magog have thus earned a position in apocalyptic literature over the centuries.

Chapters 40–48 are a closing section in which Ezekiel has a vision of a restored Temple in Jerusalem with its form of worship reestablished and a restored Israel, with each of the ancient tribes receiving appropriate allotments. Ezekiel’s prophecies while in exile in Babylon were to have a significant influence on the religion of Judaism as it emerged from a time of reassessment of its religious beliefs and cultic acts during the Babylonian Exile (586–538 bce).” – Britannica.com

Ultimately, for the purposes of this current study the focal issue is the mention of a book in God’s keeping given to Ezekiel at the beginning of this prophetic predictions about the future. Of course, it should be noted that Ezekiel is told to eat the book. It must be conceded that the symbolic nature of this act could possibly indicate that there is no book given to Ezekiel. But even if Ezekiel’s reception of a book is only symbolic, the story still symbolizes the transmission of information about the future from God to a chosen messenger. And since we know from Daniel and Revelation that such a book about the future does exist in heaven, the inclusion of the book imagery in this passage would at least reflect that Ezekiel is given information from such a heavenly book. However, it is equally likely that the act of eating is the only symbolic language in the narrative while the book and its reception by Ezekiel occurs literally.

In fact, the literal reality of the book in Ezekiel is also affirmed by the Apostle John’s similar experience Revelation.

Revelation 10:1 And I saw another **mighty angel come down from heaven,** clothed with a cloud: and **a rainbow was upon his head,** and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: 2 And he had **in his hand a little book open:** and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, 3 And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. 4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. 5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, 6 And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: 7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound,

the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets. **8 And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. 9 And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. 10 And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. 11** And he said unto me, **Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. 11:1 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. 2 But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Before we begin our analysis of this passage, we should note that verses 4-7 contain information related to the idea of “sealing” a book. We will return to these verses a little while later in our study. For now, we turn our attention back to the similarities to Ezekiel’s experiences.

First, we should also take note that Revelation 11:1-2 specifically describes John’s vision of the Temple of God as well as John measuring that Temple, which is remarkably similar to Ezekiel measuring a Temple in the visions starting in Ezekiel 40.

Second, notice that Revelation 10 begins in verse 1 with John seeing a mighty angel that has a rainbow over his head. The inclusion of the rainbow surrounding the angel is similar to the Ezekiel’s depiction of the Person of God seated on the throne. In our Revelation Chronology study, we establish that this mighty angel in Revelation is, in fact, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. The reference to the Holy Spirit as an “angel” corresponds to the use of the title “angel of God” in the Old Testament, the fact that the word “angel” means “messenger,” the role of the Holy Spirit as God’s messenger at times in the Old Testament, and Jesus’ direct assertion that the Holy Spirit would be Jesus’ emissary to the church after Jesus’ ascension. Although it is a topic for another study, the depiction of God on the mobile throne (carried by angels) in Ezekiel is possibly also a reference to the Holy Spirit, who at times in the Old Testament was alternately depicted as the Person of God seated in the Temple in Jerusalem. Similarities abound between the Old and New Testaments concerning the role of the Word coming to earth provide monumental deliverance and enact a covenant only to subsequently return to heaven and send the Holy Spirit as his emissary to dwell among his covenant people. Ultimately, the important point is simply the similarity between the depiction of God in Ezekiel and John’s depiction of this angel in Revelation 10. And as we move forward a few verses in Revelation 10, we see that the uncanny similarity does not end with the rainbow.

Third, notice in the very next verse (Revelation 10:2) that this might angel is not only adorned with a rainbow but also has a book in his hand that John is told to

take and eat. This is a direct parallel to Ezekiel 3 in which Ezekiel is told to take a book out of the hand of God and eat it. The similarity is explicit. Notice that in verses 9-10, John is told that in his mouth the book will taste sweet as honey, which is exactly how Ezekiel describes the taste of the book he is given in Ezekiel 3. This parallel adds further confirmation that the figure identified as a mighty angel in Revelation 10 is actually God the Holy Spirit. But more importantly, the connection between the two passages affirms the reality of this book about the future.

Fourth, we know that the book in Revelation 10 is an actual book, despite the symbolic act of eating it. This certainty stems from statements made early on in chapter 1 of Revelation.

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: 2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. 3 **Blessed is he that readeth,** and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand... 9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 **I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches** which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea... 19 **Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;**

Here in chapter 1, we see plain language that John is given information about the future from Jesus (whose own reception of the scroll is depicted out of sequence in chapters 4-6). And John is told to write that information about the future in a book that he is instructed to distribute to the churches. In short, John is literally given a book, not just in the sense that John is given the task of writing a book but also in the sense that the book John is writing contains information about the future recorded in a book in heaven that John is given access to through the context of his visionary experiences. In short, like Daniel and Ezekiel, the Apostle John was given some access to an actual heavenly book containing information about the future.

Here we should return briefly to the issue raised earlier concerning the worthiness of Daniel to not only open but also to seal the book about the future. In the case of John, it is Jesus' worthiness, not John's worthiness, which results in the book being opened and its information being conveyed to John. In contrast, our previous discussion considered whether Daniel (and possibly Ezekiel) may have been deemed worthy enough to be given at least some of the information. However, since we have examined the involvement of the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel's reception of the prophetic information from a book (and John's reception as well),

we might also consider the possibility that in all cases (including Daniel and Ezekiel) it not the worthiness of the men that is at issue. Rather, what is important is that one Person of the Trinity, whether Jesus or the Holy Spirit, seems to facilitate the transmission of the book to a human being allowing that human to view of its prophetic content about future history. If that is the case, then Daniel and Ezekiel are not really on different footing than John with regard to their worthiness to be given information from this book. This notion that the transmission of information occurs by means of a Person of the Trinity rather than by means of human worthiness is consistent with language in passages like John 16:13-15. (See below.) In John 16, Jesus declares that after his ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit would be sent to relay to the church the information that the Father gives to Jesus, including showing them “things to come,” in other words, future events.

John 16:13 Howbeit **when he, the Spirit of truth, is come**, he will guide you into all truth: for **he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.** **14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.** **15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.**

In this scenario, the access granted to other men both before and after Christ’s death and resurrection would have been given provisionally on the basis of Christ’s worthiness, not theirs. This would be consistent with Revelation 5:3-4, which states that only Christ is worthy to open the sealed book. Likewise, the transmission of the information would be facilitated by himself, by the Holy Spirit, or both as Revelation 1:1 and 22:16 seem to indicate. And although there seems to be some textual indicates that Daniel and John may have handled the heavenly book directly (as we will see momentarily), even their direct contact with the book may have been facilitated by the worthiness of Christ Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Daniel Told to Seal But John Told Not to Seal

Having established the existence of a heavenly book containing information about the future, we can now return to one of the focal questions of this paper. What does it mean for this book (or portions of this book) to be sealed or unsealed? Earlier, we dismissed the possibility that “sealed” and “unsealed” denoted the idea of veiling prophetic information in symbolic language. Our examination of Revelation 4-6 has suggested that the sealing of this book has to do with God limiting the information divulged from it. As such, Daniel sealed the book and no man could look upon it until Jesus himself received it from the Father and opened it after his resurrection.

Along these lines, we can see from Daniel 12:8 below that Daniel is told to shut and seal the book precisely when he is confused and asking for more information and clarification about the future. Consequently, we can see that shutting and

sealing the book are intended to denote a cessation of revelation from the book. Daniel is asking for more information, but instead he is told to shut and seal the book. In the context, shutting and sealing clearly denote a limit to the information revealed from the book.

Daniel 12: 1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. 2 **And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.** 3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. 4 But thou, **O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end:** many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. 5 Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. 6 And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, **How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?** 7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for **a time, times, and an half;** and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. 8 **And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?** 9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. 10 Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. 11 **And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.** 12 Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to **the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.** 13 **But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.**

But, while the final chapter of Daniel records instructions for him to shut and seal the book, verse 10 the final chapter of Revelation records instructions for the Apostle John to “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

Revelation 22:6 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and **the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.** 7 **Behold, I come quickly:** blessed is he that keepeth **the sayings of the prophecy of this book.** 8 And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. 9 Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which **keep the sayings of this book:** worship God. 10 **And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.** 11 **He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which**

is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

This contrast raises further questions about the meaning of the term sealed and unsealed. Clearly, just like the book of Daniel, the contents of the book of Revelation have remained in circulation and available for audiences to read since the time the author first wrote the text. Therefore, sealed and unsealed cannot refer to the book of Revelation or the book of Daniel being lost from circulation or lost, only later to be rediscovered and read. So, in what sense is the book sealed at the time of Daniel but left unsealed by John?

One reasonable answer seems to relate to differences regarding the timetable. For one thing, Daniel is writing over five hundred years before Christ's first advent. That's in the middle of the previous millennium. And with biblical history from creation to Christ's second coming spanning only 6,000 years, that is a significant difference in the historical context. But that's not the only timetable consideration that may be in play.

Here there are a few additional details from Daniel 12 worth noting. In verse 4, Daniel is told to "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end." This phrase, "even to the time of the end" is informative.

First, it is a very unambiguous declaration to Daniel (and his audience) that Daniel was not living in or near "the time of the end." In fact, while verses 2 and 13 both mention the future resurrection of the righteous, verse 13 specifically states that Daniel himself will die and be raised "at the end of the days." The thrust of these statements is that Daniel is so far from the end that Daniel himself will die and then have to wait for resurrection and for his inheritance at the end of the age.

In fact, Daniel doesn't just have a vague idea about whether there is an intervening period of time ahead. A few chapters earlier in chapter 9, Daniel receives a revelation about the future from God that directly touches on the amount of time that remained ahead. To understand the timing cues in chapter 9, we must review something about the calendar given in the Law of Moses. Under the Law of Moses, God established a calendar for the people of Israel, which included a continuous cycle of seven-year periods with each cycle ending in a seventh year known as a Sabbath year. (See Leviticus 25:2-4.) In Daniel 9:24-27, Daniel is told by the angel Gabriel that God had made some decrees concerning 70 specific Sabbath cycles that would occur from that time forward. Daniel is also told that 69 of those Sabbath cycles would occur before the Messiah would come. The 70 Sabbath cycles are broken into smaller sets of numbers and Daniel is not specifically told if they are all continuous or whether there would be interruptions of Sabbath cycles for which no determinations had been made. However, even if these 69 or 70 Sabbath cycles occurred back to back and were followed immediately by the time of the end, then the absolute shortest amount of time before the end would be at the very least 483 to 490 years. If the cycles were not

entirely contiguous, then there would be even more time between Daniel's day and the time of the end.

In short, God had already made very, very clear to Daniel and Daniel's contemporary audience that it would be a long time before the time of the end. And most importantly, the shutting and sealing of the book is connected directly with this unambiguous declaration to Daniel that there would be quite some time between Daniel's day and "the end." This unambiguous declaration that Daniel was not living in or near the end strongly contrasts with a perception that God strategically implemented in the New Testament, which we will discuss more momentarily.

Second, we have already discussed that Revelation 4-6 records Jesus himself unsealing the book in heaven which contains information about the future. It seems likely, but not absolutely necessary, that Jesus unsealed the book in the first century sometime after his ascension into heaven. Since Daniel is told to "seal the book until the time of the end," this would suggest the time of the end had arrived by the time Jesus unsealed the book in Revelation 4-6. Likewise, Daniel 9:24 predicts that the vision and the prophecy would be "sealed" up over the course of the 70 Sabbath cycles. Since Daniel 9:25 also declares that 69 of these Sabbath cycles would transpire before the Messiah came, it would seem that the vision and prophecy should or could be unsealed around or perhaps just after the Messiah's coming. (Earlier we suggested that it is possible to connect Jesus' statement in Mark 1:15 that the "time is fulfilled" with the completion of the first 69 weeks of Daniel 9.)

As we mentioned a previously, the biblical view is that history would contain 6,000 years from creation to the onset of the messianic kingdom on earth, which will begin at Jesus' second coming. As we establish in our studies on the "Sabbath Millennium," the "Timeline of Biblical History," and others, this was a unanimous belief of the earliest Christians of the first few centuries who had received this understanding from the Jewish apostles who had been handpicked and personally taught by Jesus. More specifically, it was understood that just as God had made the earth in six literal days and rested on the seventh day, in a similar fashion after six millennia of human history there would be a seventh millennium in which Christ would rule on earth establishing peace and rest. In this model, each single millennium was prophetically equated with one day. 2 Peter 3:8 even mentions this prophetic means of understanding God's timetable for the return of Christ and the end of the age.

This also provides an explanation regarding the sense in which authors of the New Testament at times referred enigmatically to Christians living "in the last days." If New Testament authors understood that certain texts employed the term "days" as a prophetic reference to millennia and God's largescale historical timetable, then New Testament statements about living in the last days would not be definitive declarations about whether Christians were literally only days or years away from Christ's return. Instead, New Testament authors would simply be employing existing prophetic language, in which case the phrase "living in the

last days” can be understood to refer to living in the last few millennia before Christ’s return. In either case, they were in the “last days.” But why use a phrase (“the last days”) that could so flexibly include such a wide contrast between only a few years on one end of the range and a matter of millennia on the other? Again, we will address this question below.

But concerning Daniel 12:4, as long as Christians understood this prophetic correspondence between the days of creation and the millennia of human history, then the unsealing of the book by Jesus in Revelation 4-6 could easily be understood as occurring “in the last days” just as Daniel 12:4 suggests, regardless of how close the earliest Christians actually were to Christ’s second coming and millennial kingdom. With the 69 Sabbath cycles already complete by the time of Jesus’ first coming, the unsealing of the book could occur right on schedule when only one Sabbath cycle remained.

If the “last days” and the “end times” were overlapping terms, then the last (two) millennia of human history may have been considered the last times or final age before Christ’s return. And in that sense, it may be the case that Daniel was told to seal the book because he was not in the last “two days.” Perhaps Daniel’s time was too early in history, too far from even Christ’s first coming, and therefore, God wanted to limit the amount of information divulged at that time.

The New Testament provides some basis for this conclusion. As Paul explains in passages like 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 (as well as Romans 1:1-4 and 16:25-26, Acts 3:14-18 and elsewhere), the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ had been revealed by God throughout the Old Testament but contained in enigmatic language in order to obscure the meaning so that the princes of this world would not prevent the crucifixion. To put it simply, before the crucifixion certain information about the future was deliberately guarded, especially things that pertained to Christ’s crucifixion itself. One aspect of this entailed the possibility that the Messiah would have two advents, rather than accomplishing all aspects of God’s plan and conquering the nations all at one time. This, in turn, would explain why God would limit the amount of future information given to Daniel over 500 years before the coming of the Messiah.

With these factors in place, we can now discern the reasons why God might tell Daniel to seal the book but tell John to leave the book unsealed.

First, if the instruction for Daniel to seal the book is connected to God’s open declaration to Daniel that the last days were very far away from Daniel’s time, then it stands to reason that the contrasting instruction for John not to seal the book might be connected to a strategic choice on God’s part not to reveal exactly how far away events like the resurrection of the dead were at the time John wrote the book of Revelation. In fact, while Daniel is told to seal the book because it would be some time before the end, John is told not to seal the book “for the time is at hand.” Here we see the first glimpse that when it came to John, God did not want to disclose how near or how far away the final events were, such as Jesus’ second coming and the resurrection. Given the precedent from Daniel, telling

John to seal the book would imply that the end was likewise still some distance away from the first-century.

While God wanted Daniel to go his way knowing that he would die and wait hundreds of years for the resurrection sometime in the future, there is evidence that God deliberately wanted Christians to operate as though Jesus could come back in their own lifetimes. To find evidence of this prominent New Testament principle, we need look no further than Jesus' own foundational teaching about the events of the last days before his return. Matthew 24:1-51, Mark 13:1-37, and Luke 21:1-38 all record Jesus' prophetic declarations. In each account, the discussion begins with Jesus' apostles asking him "when" certain events would happen prior to his coming and the end of the world. Jesus then proceeds to list a series of events that would culminate in his return and the end of the age. Throughout the discourse, unlike the revelations and prophecies given to Daniel, Jesus never answers the apostles' questions by disclosing a number of Sabbath cycles, centuries, or any number of years prior to the end of the age and his return. However, each of the three Gospel accounts concludes with the same sentiment from Jesus. For example, in Matthew 24:43 Jesus declares, "if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched... Therefore, be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." In other words, the exact timing of Jesus' return and the end of the age was being strategically withheld. Rather than telling his followers exactly how long it would be until he returned, Jesus instead conveyed for them the need to constantly be ready and vigilant for his return.

Matthew 24:42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. 43 But know this, that **if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched,** and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 44 **Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.**

Mark 13:34 For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. 35 **Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:** 36 **Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.** 37 **And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.**

Luke 22:34 **And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.** 35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 **Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.**

Using plain language, Matthew and Mark also explain this deliberate withholding of information in plain language. Of the two accounts, Mark's is even more explicit. Jesus himself states plainly that no man knew the day and hour of his

return, neither do the angels or even he himself as the Son of God. Instead, only the Father knows.

Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Mark 13:32 But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

Even after Jesus' death and resurrection, the apostles still inquired further about the timing of his return to establish the kingdom of God with Israel as the head of nations. They thought it might be soon and they asked Jesus in Acts 1. But once again, Jesus does not give them any indication of how much time there would be. Instead, he reminds them that, at least at the present time, that information has been reserved for the Father only. In other words, the exact time was still being withheld on purpose, even from Jesus' apostles and even after his death and resurrection. (We can take note of the fact that Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32, and Acts 1:7 all indicate that the information about the timing of Christ's second coming was held by the Father. Likewise, as we discuss in our Revelation Chronology study, the Father is the Person seated on the throne in Revelation 4-5 from whom Jesus takes the sealed book containing information about the end of the age.)

Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, **they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.**

Later in the New Testament, Paul continues to assert this basic principle regarding the deliberate withholding of information about the exact time of Jesus' return and the end of the age. Using the phrase "times or seasons" from Acts 1:7 (and Daniel 2:21) and borrowing heavily from Jesus' parable of the thief in the night from Matthew 24, Paul writes the following in 1 Thessalonians 5.

1 Thessalonians 5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. **2** For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. **3** For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. **4** But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. **5** Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. **6** Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

With these words, Paul affirms that the timing of the Lord's return has not been specifically declared, just as the coming of a thief in the night is not specifically declared. And the only remedy Christians had was to be watchful concerning the signs of his approaching return. In simple terms, the ample amount of information

regarding signs and events that would precede Jesus' return was the substitute for knowing the exact amount of time.

These are but a few of the New Testament passages asserting this basic principle. But they are sufficient to establish it as a cornerstone of New Testament strategy regarding knowledge of the future. A great deal of knowledge about the end times was given to Christians in the New Testament, but the exact amount of time was not disclosed. This information was withheld in order to cultivate an attitude of watchfulness and an ever ready disposition. In other words, while Daniel was told that it would be hundreds of years and many generations would die before the Messiah's first coming, God's strategy in the New Testament was to cultivate the attitude among Christians that Christ's return could occur in their lifetimes. Christians were to treat the Lord's return as though the events leading to it could begin at any time. There was no longer an intervening, enigmatic first advent to accomplish. The only thing left was Christ's return. It was "up next," so to speak. It was "on deck" as we might say today. Or, in New Testament terms, it was "at hand."

We can now specifically contrast this New Testament principle with the declaration to Daniel that he should seal the book because he would die and it would be a long time before the end. If God had likewise told the Apostle John to seal the book, it might have suggested that like Daniel, the end times were still far off. Conversely, leaving the book unsealed at the time of John would have maintained the possibility that the end times might not be very far off. Simply put, John was told not to seal the book in order to avoid conveying that it would be a long time before the end as had been the case with Daniel. Such an indication that the end was far off would have been contrary to God's expressed intention for Christians to be ready at all times.

Second, in addition to the desire for Christians to remain vigilant, by the time John wrote the book of Revelation in the last first century AD, there was no need to seal the book in order to limit the information. With critical events like the crucifixion, resurrection, and first advent accomplished, Jesus could reveal not just a portion but all of the salient information about the future events that would occur during the times of the end. Not only was there no need to limit the information as there was in Daniel's day 500 years before Christ's first coming, but by the first century AD there was actually a reason to convey a great deal of information. God's desire to keep Christians on their toes regarding exactly when Christ might return had a corollary.

Not knowing exactly when Jesus would come back, Christians might be unprepared unless God divulged a great deal of information about what came next. In that way, even though Christians wouldn't be able to count down a known number of years, they could watch for the prophetic signs and prepare. Consequently, leaving the book unsealed was not only necessary to avoid giving Christians a sense that they might have plenty of time to slack off, but leaving it unsealed was necessary so that all of the major milestones could be divulged, rather than just some. Since the exact timetable was withheld, divulging all the

critical details was now the only way given to help Christians identify when the end approached so they could be ready. And, of course, this approach to identifying the timeframe for the end would engender the constant vigilance that God desired, rather than eroding it. And their readiness and vigilance was, after all, exactly what God desired to achieve and what revealing an exact timetable for Jesus' return would undermine.

In summary, Daniel was told to seal the book because God had already made it known that it would be at least hundreds of years before the end and because many of the events and dynamics of Christ's coming were being kept enigmatic and obscure before their fulfillment. This naturally led to a strategy to limit the amount of information divulged from the book in Daniel's day, which is why it was sealed. Conversely, there were three reasons that John was told not to seal the book. First, the enigmatic events of the first advent had already been fulfilled, so there was no need to limit or guard the information about the future. Second, sealing the book as Daniel did would have conveyed that the times of the end were far in the future, but God did not want to convey to early Christians that the end was far off. And third, God wanted to give Christians a great deal of information that they could watch for to discern the times and remain prepared, especially since God did not want to specifically reveal how much time remained ahead before the end.

The Seven Thunders Sealed

So far we discussed the existence of a heavenly book containing information about the future. We have also explored the idea that sealing the book refers to limiting the amount of information disclosed from that book. Daniel was allowed to know some of the information in that book, but Daniel lived 500 years before Christ. At that time, God was still keeping certain kinds of information enigmatic, particularly concerning the two advents of Christ as well as Christ's death and resurrection. So, God limited how much information Daniel could learn and disclose from the book. Instead, the Book of Daniel itself ends with Daniel asking for more information regarding the future but instead being told to shut and seal the heavenly book.

The Apostle John, on the other hand, was writing after enigmatic events relating to Christ's first advent are fulfilled. At that point all of the major future events can be revealed including the relationship between those events and the two advents of Christ. As such, Christ reveals information to John about all of those events on a scale that surpasses Daniel. Thus, information that was sealed to Daniel is now unsealed for God's people, which is partially why the Book of Revelation ends with John being told not to seal the book. In other words, there is no information about major events that were being withheld from John and his fellow Christians.

However, we have also discussed that there is one type of information which was still being withheld from John and the church: the exact amount of time that

would transpire before Christ's second coming to establish his kingdom at the end of this age of history. We have established at length the New Testament's strategic withholding of the exact amount of time in concern with God's intention to cultivate a Christian attitude of vigilance and ever-ready faithfulness.

As it turns out, there is one portion of the Book of Revelation that John is told to seal and not write. Our analysis so far suggests that this portion of Revelation is not disclosed because it is at least partially comprised of information that relates to the exact amount of time between John's day and Jesus' return. It is worth noting that we've already examined this passage from Revelation earlier in this study when we were establishing the similarity between Ezekiel's experience and that of the Apostle John. This is the very same chapter in which John is told to take a book from the hand of a figure surrounded by a rainbow and to eat it, just like Ezekiel was.

Revelation 10:1 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: **2** And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, **3** And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. **4** And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. **5** And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, **6** And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, **that there should be time no longer:** **7** But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets. **8** And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. **9** And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. **10** And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. **11** And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

At this time, we will focus not on the similarities to Ezekiel, but on the contents of verses 3-7. These verses contain the only portion of the book that is sealed. To be clear, the book itself is not sealed as stated in Revelation 22:10, but this specific portion of information is an exception and remains sealed.

We will start with verse 3. We explained earlier that this "mighty angel" is most likely a reference to God the Holy Spirit, not just an ordinary angel. And when he makes a loud cry in verse 3, there is a response from what the text refers to as

“seven thunders.” In both Testaments, the appearance and sound of angels is often described in comparison to lightning and thunder. (More information on this is outlined in our Trinity Study in an addendum entitled, “Angels Involvement in the Law of Moses.”) The seven thunders mentioned here in Revelation 10 are most likely a reference to a particular group of seven righteous angels known in the Old Testament as the eyes of the Lord, who roam to and fro throughout the earth searching for those whose hearts are perfect toward God so that God can work mightily on their behalf. (More information on these seven angels can be found in our position paper entitled, “Seven Angels and Former Rains” as well as our Revelation Chronology study.) These seven angels include Michael and Gabriel, who are mentioned by name in Daniel and Revelation, with Gabriel functioning as a deputy messenger to God’s people on behalf of the Word and the Holy Spirit.

These angels, known as the “seven eyes,” deserve some additional comments here. When Solomon first builds the temple of God, he prays in 1 Kings 8:28-30 that God’s eyes will be open toward the temple night and day and that God would hear the prayers offered there. One chapter later, in 1 Kings 9:1-5 God appears to Solomon and tells him that his prayer has been heard and God will put his “eyes” forever on the temple. God also promises that if Solomon will walk before him in integrity of heart, then God will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever. These passages from 1 Kings do not specify that there are seven eyes, but they do establish the relationship between “the eyes of the Lord,” God establishing those whose hearts are right toward him, and the Temple, which will all continue to come into play regarding these seven eyes. (In the Hebrew, the phrase “whose hearts are perfect toward God” actually conveys the concept of having an understanding that is complete and accurate. More information about the meaning of the phrase “perfect heart” is contained in our “Study of All Biblical Prayers.”)

In 2 Chronicles 16:9, we find another reference to the “eyes of the Lord.” This time the text describes God giving victory because the king trusted in God. This passage describes the eyes of the Lord as “running to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”

2 Chronicles 16:8 Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. **9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them** whose heart *is* perfect toward him...

When the Jews return from exile and begin the work of rebuilding the Temple, we find the eyes of the Lord mentioned again. This is not surprising given the connection of the eyes of the Lord to the temple in 1 Kings. Zechariah records the Lord’s words concerning the work of the High Priest Joshua and Zerubbabel the Governor on the foundation stone of the temple.

Zechariah 3:8 Hear now, **O Joshua the high priest**, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the **BRANCH**. **9 For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes:** behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the **LORD** of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day...**4:9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.** **10** For who hath despised the day of small things? **for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.**

Here in chapter 4:10, we see a recurrence of the description from 2 Chronicles 16:9 that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth. But this time, we see that Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10 inform us that there are seven eyes. And these seven eyes are concerned with the reconstruction of the Temple. God is promising the high priest and the governor will be successful in reconstructing it. Again, the work of these seven eyes seems to be to give success to those who are serving God correctly, especially if they are involved with temple worship.

And just when Revelation 5 is describing Jesus taking the sealed book from the hand of the Father, we also find a reference to these seven eyes.

Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, **the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.** **6** And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a **Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.** **7** And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

In fact, verse 6 actually explains to us that these seven eyes are seven godly spirits who are “sent forth into all the earth,” a phrase that is unmistakably parallel to 2 Chronicles and Zechariah 3-4. Given the presence of these seven eyes when Jesus receives the sealed book from the hand of the Father in Revelation 5, it is not surprising that we find these seven thunders present in Revelation 10 when John takes a book from the hand of the mighty angel. The parallel strongly suggests these seven thunders are most likely a reference to these same seven angelic spirits described in Revelation 5, 2 Chronicles 16, and Zechariah 3-4 as the seven eyes of God.

Now that we know who these seven thunders are, we can return to the question of why their words alone are sealed out of all the information disclosed in the Book of Revelation. It will not be possible to identify exactly what they say, but the basic topic of their comments is suggested by three lines of evidence. As suggested earlier, their reply likely includes information about the amount of time that would pass between John writing the Book of Revelation and Jesus’ return. But before we elaborate on these three lines of evidence, it is also worth noting

that John's initial response to hearing their remarks is to write down what they said just as he had written everything else he had seen and hear up to this point. This tells us that there was nothing about their comments that struck John as out of bounds in terms of prophetic precedent. If these angels were divulging information about the amount of time, that probably would not have struck John as out of the ordinary given the fact that Gabriel had previously revealed to Daniel measurable units of time that would elapse prior to the first coming of the Messiah. With that said, we will now move on to our three lines of evidence that the seven angels are making statements that would have disclosed the amount of time between John's day and Jesus' return.

First, there is the basic New Testament principle that we have already established in which God strategically and repeatedly does not reveal the amount of time before Jesus' return. Given the amazing detail about future events revealed in Revelation and elsewhere which was unsealed and openly made known, it stands to reason that the one piece of information in Revelation that is not disclosed would relate to the one topic God had consistently, strategically not disclosed throughout all the prophecy in the New Testament.

Second, the Holy Spirit's reply must also be considered. As soon as John is told not to write the words of the seven thunders in verse 4, the Holy Spirit immediately swears an oath in verses 5- that "there should be time no longer." He goes on in verse 7 to state that the things God has prophetically declared will be completed at the time the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. (These seven angels with seven trumpets are a key theme in Revelation, starting in chapter 8. We discuss the trumpets in more detail in our Revelation Chronology study.) It is interesting that the Holy Spirit's oath not only comes in response to the words of the seven thunders but also specifically has to do with the declaration about the amount of time left. Specifically, the Holy Spirit declares that there will be no more time. In other words, the time had come for the fulfillment of prophecy related to Christ's return. The fact that the Holy Spirit is discussing time supports the idea that the seven thunders were also making statements concerning the same subject: time. When we combine the contextual support that time is the subject of the discourse with the fact that the seven angels' words are sealed and not disclosed, we find two separate confirmations that the sealing of their words is due directly to God's consistent strategy not to divulge exactly how much time would pass before Christ's return.

Third, we can look elsewhere for references to these "eyes of the Lord." And as we might expect, we find such a reference in the Book of Daniel. Of course, as we mentioned earlier, Daniel does mention the angels Michael and Gabriel by name, who are both members of this group known as the "eyes of the Lord." But Daniel contains another, more telling reference which further hints that the subject of Revelation 10 includes information about the amount of time.

We find this account in Daniel 4 where Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, has a dream that he tells to Daniel so that Daniel can interpret it.

Daniel 4:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. 2 I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. 3 How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation. 4 I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me...8 But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying...13 I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; 14 He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches...17 This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. 18 This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee. 19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies...23 And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; 24 This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king...37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

First, we might take note that this dream begins with a “watcher” coming down from heaven and crying in a loud voice, as we can see in verses 13-14. This is exactly how Revelation 10:1-3 begins, although for reasons we will discuss momentarily the messenger here in Daniel 4 is likely one of the seven “eyes” rather than the Holy Spirit.

Second, although this passage in Daniel 4 does not mention the seven eyes by name, nor does it mention a specific number of angels, the conceptual similarity between the figurative title “eyes of the Lord” and the more literal term “watcher” is unmistakable. Both are clearly references to angelic figures. Revelation 5:6 refers to the eyes of the Lord as godly spirits. Here we have a holy angel. And the primary description of both has to do with “eyes” and “watching.” There should

be little doubt that this “watcher” in Daniel 4 is one of the seven godly spirits known as the “eyes of the Lord.”

Third, notice the information about the watcher’s statements, the relationship between the watchers’ decree, God’s actions, and the purpose God seeks to accomplish through this series of events. Although one watcher relays the decree to Nebuchadnezzar in verse 13-14, verse 17 plainly states that the decree itself is from the watchers plural, not just one but all of them. This suggests that all seven of the angelic watchers, or “eyes,” have expressed consensus on this subject. However, verse 24 likewise describes this decree as not only the decree of the watchers but also the “decree of the most High.” Either God is dictating this to the watchers or God is issuing a decree based on the unanimous report and recommendation of those angels he has sent forth to be his eyes on the earth. Verse 17 describes this decree as “the demand by the word of the holy ones,” which seems to suggest that the decree originates from the watchers and God approves their request. This seems potentially parallel to Revelation 10 in which the Holy Spirit cries aloud before the seven thunders reply and then the Holy Spirit issues an oath or a decree after the seven thunders respond. Next, the motivation for the watchers’ decree is spelled out plainly in verse 17 as well, which says that the decree was demanded “to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.” This is interesting given that Revelation 11, just one chapter after Revelation 10, declares the onset of the kingdom of God alongside the sounding of the seventh angel’s trumpet, which is also mentioned in Revelation 10:7. In a conceptual parallel to Daniel 4:17, Revelation 11:15 says, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Finally, notice from Daniel 4:23 that the watchers make this decree concerning a certain, specified period of years, specifically seven years or one Sabbath cycle.

From these details emerges a relevant picture regarding Revelation 10. The seven eyes of the Lord roam the earth, report back to God with their findings, and their recommendations at least sometimes involve decrees regarding specified periods of time and the purpose of demonstrating God’s rule over human kingdoms. (The notion that the seven angels have a role in making declarations about amounts of time related to dominion over earthly kingdoms and the coming of the Messianic kingdom is also suggested by the correspondence between the number of angelic watchers or “eyes” and the number of years in the decreed periods of time. This includes their decree about Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4, the seventy sevens of Daniel 9, and perhaps even the seventy years of desolations under the Babylonian rule mentioned in Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10, and Daniel 9:2). If the same items are in play in Revelation, then it is probable that the Holy Spirit is summoning the seven eyes who then make a recommendation, which results in the Holy Spirit decreeing that “there will be no more time” but that the prophecies God has declared will soon be fulfilled.

And if Daniel 4 is any indication, the reply of the watchers may entail some declaration regarding a specific number of years. (Likewise, in Daniel 9 one of

these seven angels, Gabriel, comes to tell Daniel about additional decrees regarding future events that would occur at particular amounts of time marked by seven-year time periods.) While this comparison to Daniel 4 doesn't tell us whether the seven watchers' remarks in Revelation 10 would divulge how much time would elapse between John's day and the return of Jesus, it provides precedent which again affirms the likelihood that the seven thunders might be making statements referring to specific amounts of years perhaps even in terms of seven-year cycles. And that would in turn explain why God would seal, rather than disclose, the words of the seven eyes in Revelation 10.

The exact content of the seven thunders' words is not possible. However, if their words are sealed and John is not allowed to write them because they contain information about the amount of time from John's day to Jesus' return, then certain logical necessities emerge. For example, any chronological information in their remarks would probably have to be understandable to Christians of all generations who might read the book of Revelation.

To illustrate, it would not be sufficient for the seven angels to declare something like, "6,000 years have been completed since creation." As discussed in depth in our position paper, "The First-Century Apostolic Understanding of Chronology," first-century Jews and Christians had access to not only Hebrew (and Aramaic) translations of the Old Testament but also the Greek Septuagint. These two translations differed with regard to the number of years that appear in relation to certain patriarch's and periods of Old Testament history. The Septuagint translation reported that much more time had elapsed since creation (with regard to periods of time in Genesis) than in the Hebrew translations. The result was a significant difference in how close the first century was thought to be to the six-thousandth year from creation, depending on whether one was looking at a Hebrew or Greek translation. As we state in our position paper, "in the Septuagint, the amount of time from Adam to the Flood is around 500 years greater than the amount listed in the Masoretic Hebrew texts we have today. And, the amount of time the Septuagint provides for the period from Adam to Abraham is almost 1,500 years more than the amounts provided in the Masoretic texts." As a result, the early Christians did not know if they were living around 4,000 years since creation or around 5,500 years since creation.

In addition, as we stated previously, early Christians for the first few centuries unanimously believed that Christ's kingdom would constitute a seventh millennium after a period of six millennia counting back to creation itself. Consequently, because of the difference between the chronologies provided in the Hebrew and Septuagint texts, declaring to early Christians that these six thousand years had come to pass would not do anything to clarify how many years had transpired from creation by the time John wrote Revelation. Therefore, such a declaration by the seven thunders would do very little to divulge how much time remained ahead before Christ would return. Because of these considerations we can reasonably conclude that the seven thunders were not simply reporting that Christ would come back at the six-thousandth year from creation. If that was all the declared, then it would not have to be sealed.

In order to warrant being sealed up, their response would have to contain information that could divulge how much time was left until Christ's return, including from a first-century perspective. In order to clue early Christians in on how long it would be until Christ's return, the statement of the seven thunders would have to be much more specific. A statement favoring either the Hebrew or the Septuagint chronological information would suffice, but it is unlikely that the angels would have gone out of their way in this context to make a highly technical declaration about the reliability of dating information in one translation over another.

On the other hand, if the reply of the seven thunders included a statement denoting how many years had transpired since Christ's death, resurrection, or ascension (or a similar event), then Christians of John's day or any generation would instantly be able to determine how much time still remained before the return of Christ. Likewise, the precedent of Daniel 9 would also allow for the possibility that the seven thunders declared the number of weeks of years that remained ahead between John's day and Christ's second coming. In either case, God's efforts to instill in Christians a sense of vigilance and an ever-ready attitude would unravel, particularly for those Christians who might be living hundreds or thousands of years prior to Christ's return. If God intended to maintain the strategy to cultivate vigilance, any such statement would have to be sealed or removed from John's account in the Book of Revelation. Likewise, although less direct, any statement denoting names of future countries or individuals could also provide sufficient clues that the time was not yet nearby. Consequently, it is possible (but perhaps less likely) that the seven angels statements in Revelation 10 could have also contained such information.

Conclusions

Scripture indicates that there is a heavenly book containing information about the future, that God has governed the disclosure of information from this book over human history, that unsealing the book refers to disclosing its information, and that the sealing of the book refers to limitations placed on such disclosures. Ultimately, Daniel was told to seal the book due to his great distance in time from the end as well as the fact that he lived before Jesus' first advent, which to some extent was being kept enigmatic. John was told not to seal the book due to the fact that the first advent had already happened by John's day, due to God's desire not to hint at how far away the end was from John's day, and due to God's desire to disclose all of the major milestones that still remained in the future to the church from the time of the first century.