

Session Two

Revelation



The book of Revelation is of non-literary origins, in the sense that it was not written to be analysed logically and in a linear fashion.

It relies for a great deal of its effect on sounds, sights, imagination, descriptions, symbols and repetition.

Eugene Peterson

Peterson, E. H. 1969, "Apocalypse: The Medium is the Message", in *Theology Today*, vol 26, pp 133-141.

All the same, one does not get the feeling that they are illuminating the message of the book by their work. They do a superb job on its syntax, its mythological associations, its theology.

But they are deaf to its medium: they never hear the trumpets. They are Gutenberg men all the way.

The importance of the mass numbers in Revelation, Chapter Seven, is an instance: the squared number, 144,000, and the indefinite "multitude which no man can number."

The incursion of violent evil is inaugurated by the four horsemen in Chapter Six. It is met by the *feel* of righteous, victorious *magnitude* in chapter seven.

The mass numbers provide a sensory response of victory. The effect of the numbers in the vision of Chapter Seven on a sensorily alive person is to extend his *feeling* of God's protection and victory in the face of pressing evil.

Eugene Peterson

The new Jerusalem is a city with perfect proportions and infinite space. It is most striking that the new heaven is not pictured as a restored garden of Eden, but as a new city.

The pagan vision of the future is Eden or Arcadia – a primitivistic return to uncomplicated individualism. ... But the biblical vision is a perfection of the city. This artifice of society for living consciously together is culminated, not eliminated.

Eugene Peterson

It may be two more generations before the Christian church will hear, see, and feel the message of the Apocalypse without "Gutenberg distortion." But ... the contemporary world provides the most favourable milieu for a hermeneutic of the Apocalypse since at least the fourteenth century, and maybe even the second.

Television-trained lay Christians may discover that it is the one biblical book in which they hold an interpretive advantage over their more bookish pastors and theologians.

It may again become the brilliant climax to the scriptural canon that it once was, instead of the bizarre embarrassment it has been for so many centuries.

Eugene Peterson

Imagery : symbols, metaphors, numbers, titles or names.

- **Fire: judgement;**
- **Scroll: a message from God;**
- **Serpent: Satan;**
- **Throne: seat of authority;**
- **White robes: righteousness;**
- **Numbers, e.g. 7, 10, 12, and various multiples: perfect, large, complete.**

Can symbols and metaphors and apocalyptic still be True?

It is always important in all of Scripture to decide what genre one is reading:

- Metaphor; (Psalm 23)
- Literal description; (The crucifixion scenes)
- Spiritual metaphor; (Isaiah 61)
- Chronological narrative; (Most of Acts)
- Compressed narrative; (Much of the Exodus story)
- Fictional narrative; (Most parables)
- Symbolic narrative; (Nathan's story to David after his sin with Bathsheba; also possibly the entire book of Job).

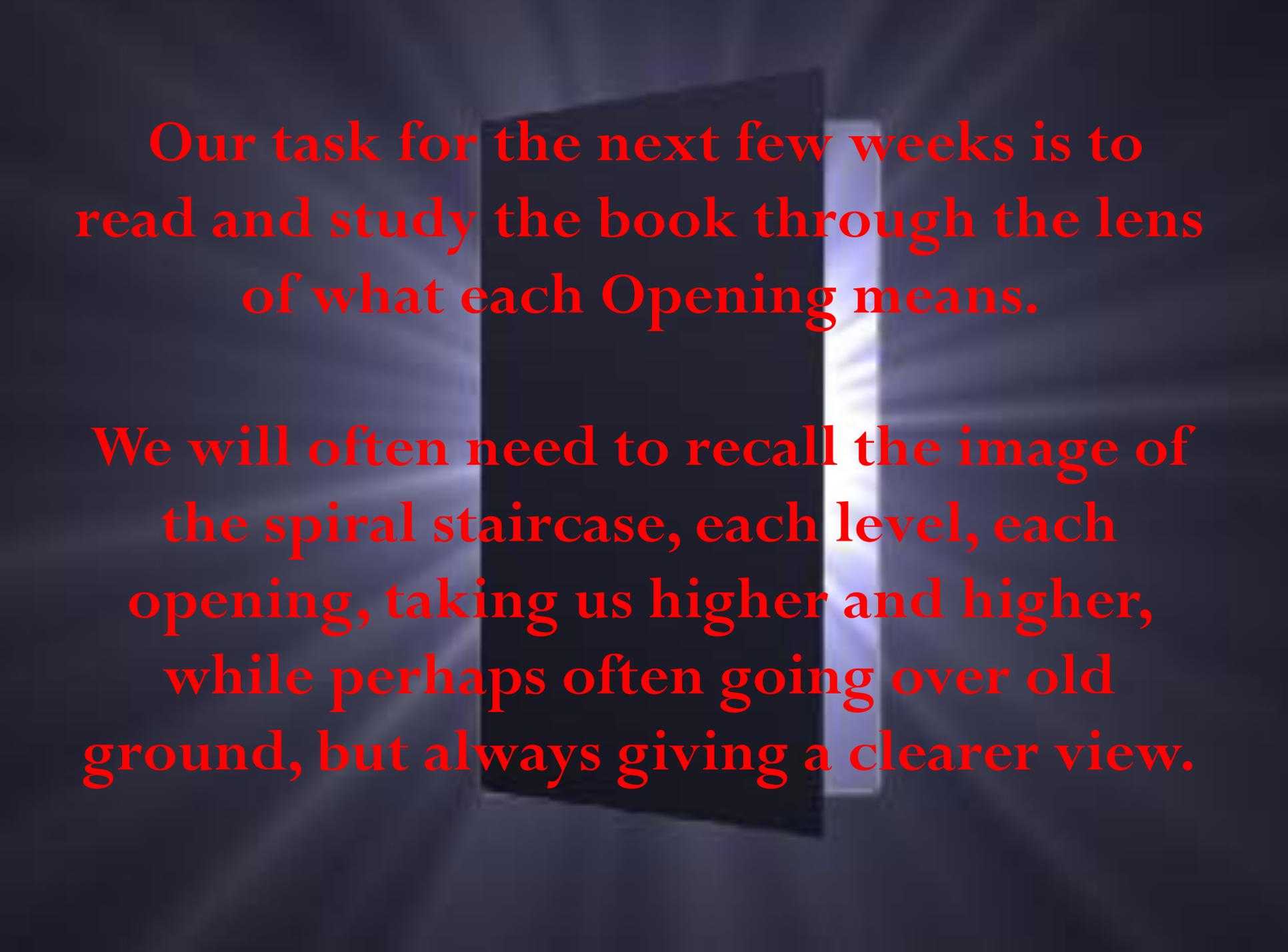
All of these are still “true” in the sense that they contain God's truth that he intended to communicate to us.

How to read apocalyptic:

- 1. Learn to recognise Imagery: symbols, metaphors, numbers, titles or names;**
- 2. A real thing sits behind an image or a name; if unsure of the connection, at least note the characteristic of the thing, and use that for a reference;**
- 3. The spiral staircase model of reading – add gradually to your total impact of meaning;**
- 4. Reverse the normal rule of scripture interpretation – “the plain meaning is probably the real meaning”;**
- 5. Constantly remind yourself of the genre, and think about how to read that genre;**
- 6. Recognise that Truth can often be found in story, myth and symbol. Simple instruction is not Truth’s only home.**



**Professor
John
Lennox**



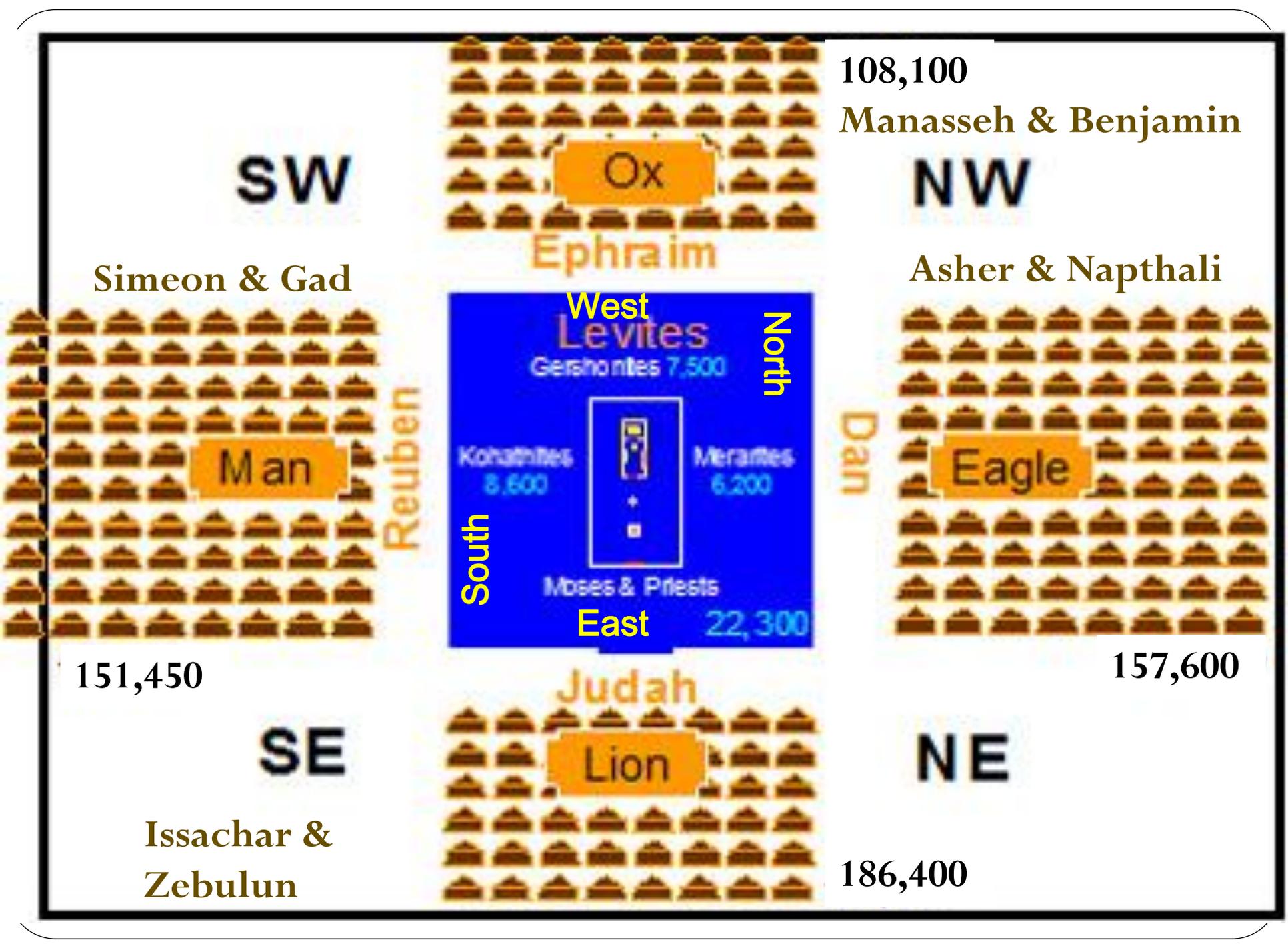
Our task for the next few weeks is to read and study the book through the lens of what each Opening means.

We will often need to recall the image of the spiral staircase, each level, each opening, taking us higher and higher, while perhaps often going over old ground, but always giving a clearer view.

Location	Throne of God	Throne of Evil	Throne for Redeemed Humans
Prologue and Letters	3	1	0
First Opening	15	0	1
Second Opening	8	0	0
Third Opening	1	0	1
Fourth Opening	2	1	0
Fifth Opening	3	1	0
Sixth Opening	6	0	1
Total	38	3	3

The Israelite Camp in the Wilderness:

- Numbers 2: long list of how the camp was to be set out;
- Over and over again in Revelation, we see echoes of the Exodus;
- We see the heavenly pattern reflected in the earthly form...



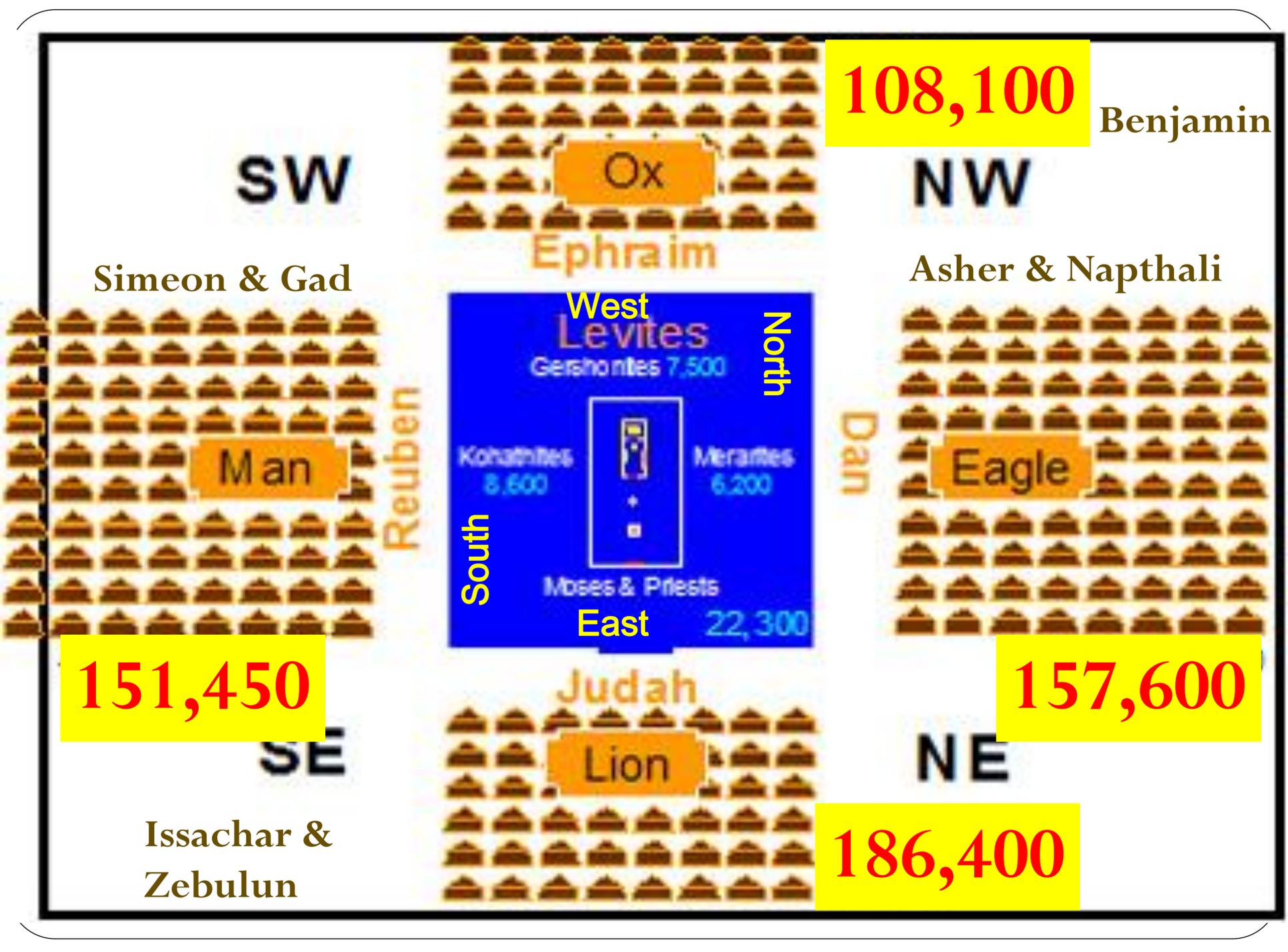
In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. **The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:**

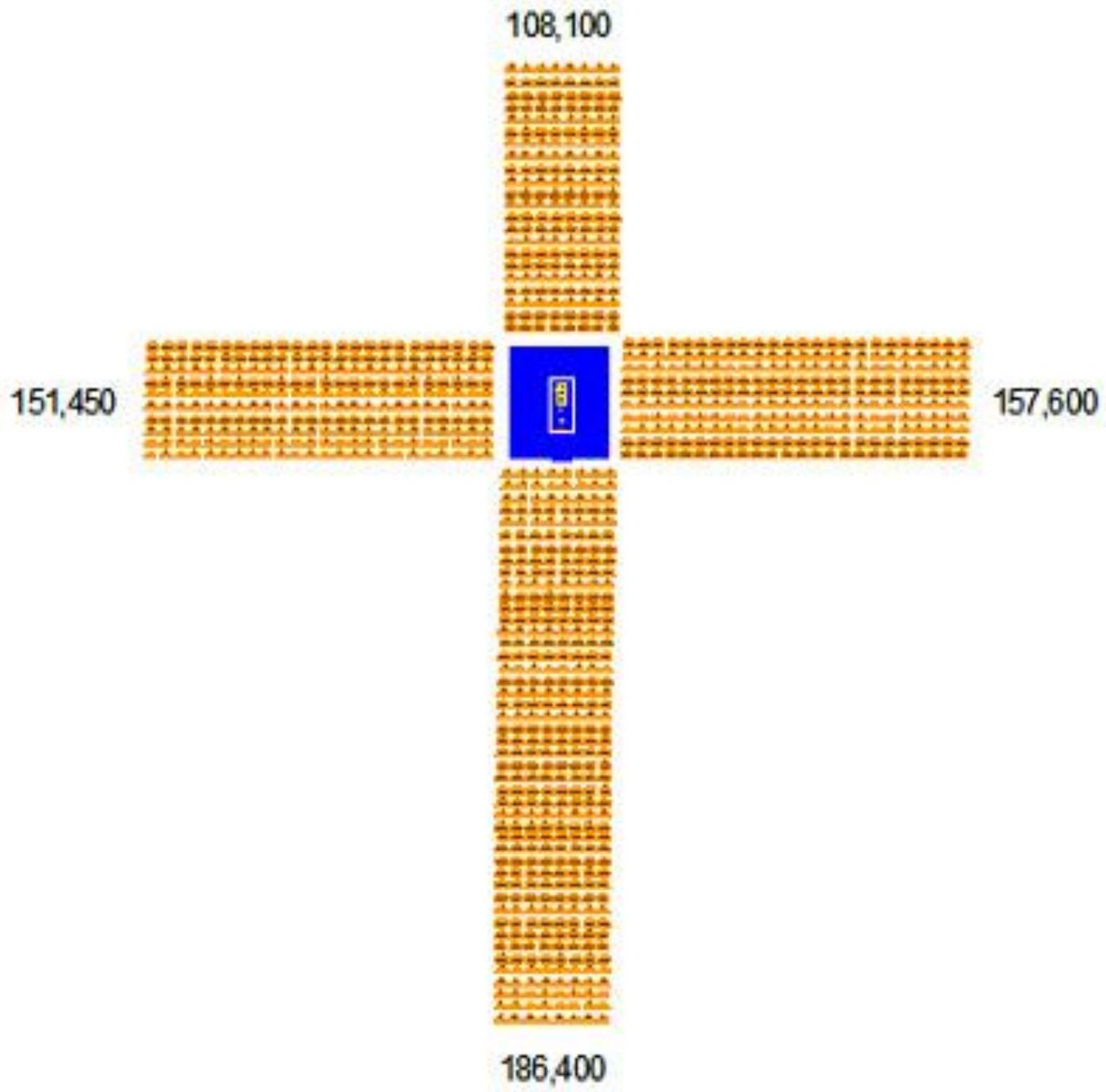
**“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”**

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

**“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”**

Revelation 4: 6 - 11





Why would the living creatures give thanks?

- For their (and others') existence;
- For government and justice;
- For goodness;
- For His own dear self.

Creatorship implies that *the creature* owes respect, allegiance, loyalty and worship. It is in our createdness that we “have our being” (v11).

God created me and therefore I have real being and real meaning.

It is critical that we not miss the paradoxical significance of this Lamb of God sharing in the identity and sovereignty of God. In his exaltation Jesus remains the Lamb, the crucified one. He participates in God's identity and reign, making him worthy of worship, as the slaughtered Lamb, and only as such. This is the consistent witness of the New Testament: that the exalted Lord remains the crucified Jesus. When this witness is neglected or forgotten, trouble follows swiftly.

Any reading of Revelation that forgets this central New Testament truth is theologically problematic, even dangerous, from its very inception. It is doomed, not to failure, but to success—and that is its inherent theological problem.

Human beings, even apparently faithful Christians, too often want an almighty deity who will rule the universe with power, preferably on their terms, and with force when necessary. Such a concept of God and of sovereignty empowers its adherents to side with this kind of God in [the use of force] in the quest for divine justice.

The reality of the Lamb as Lord—and thus of Lamb power—is, or should be, the end of all such misperceptions of divine power and justice. Of course, both historically and today, it is not.

Revelation is often misread as a demonstration precisely of this kind of divine power in human history, especially in interpreting the visions of judgment.

*Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly**

When earth-bound men want symbols of power they conjure up mighty bears and birds of prey. Russia elevates the bear, Britain the lion, France the tiger, the USA the spread eagle – all of them ravenous.

It is only the Kingdom of Heaven that would dare to use as a symbol of its might, not the Lion for which John was looking, but the helpless Lamb and at that, a slain Lamb.

Leon Morris

Four Ancient Human Questions:

1. Who is God?
2. What will be done about the problem of evil?
How will God deal justly with this problem?
3. What is the future of mankind, both those who love and serve God, and others?
4. What is the Kingdom of God? How will it come to pass? What is it like? Who will be a part of it? When will it come?

God's power, indeed the triune nature is made known to the world in the act of self-emptying.

Self-emptying is not so much a single act as the fundamental disposition of the eternal relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit.

The incarnation, life death and resurrection of Jesus has become the decisive revelation to us of that self-emptying that eternally characterises the triune life of Christ.

Michael Gorman

Summary of this Opening:

- The supreme and indescribable Majesty of God who sits on his throne of absolute holiness and power;
- The Lamb of God whose vulnerability and weakness in self-sacrificial service is his source of real and undefeatable Power;
- The interaction of Heaven and Earth as shown by the receiving by God of our human prayers.