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A0544 – October 30, 2005 – Revelation 7:9-17 – A Great Multitude

Last week we studied the 144,000 Jewish witnesses. We concluded that these 144,000 Jewish males who are believers in the Messiahship of Jesus will be given a protective seal upon their foreheads between the 6th and 7th seals. A question was asked last week in relation to the seal. “Do non-believers see the seal of God?” The Greek text of verse 3 reads *epi ton metopon auton*, “upon the forehead of them” (also cf 14:1). *First*, the preposition *epi* “upon” shows that it is not a seal underneath the skin of the forehead or in the frontal lobe but is upon the surface of the forehead. *Second*, the seal is placed on the most visible location of the body, the forehead, which indicates that it is not invisible to some and visible to others. If it is not visible then why place it upon the “forehead”? *Third*, the seal itself according to Rev 14:1 is written (*grapho*) upon the forehead. There is no indication that the writing is invisible to non-believers and visible to believers. *Fourth*, if the mark of the beast is a counterfeit of the seal of the living God then it is apparent that the seal is visible to all and serves to designate one’s alliance. These four evidences show that the seal is visible to all so that it is apparent to everyone who the 144,000 belong to, who they are allied with, as well as providing a visible witness of the crucified Lamb (cf 14:1). In relation to this question and the importance of a visible seal, it is commonly thought that the rapture cannot happen before the whole world hears the gospel. This is simply not true. However, the whole world must hear the gospel before the 2nd Coming of Christ in His Kingdom (Walvoord). So, the 144,000 are visibly sealed just after the 6th seal in order to play a major role in announcing to the whole world the gospel of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. The reason chapter 7 intrudes between the 6th and 7th seals is to answer the rhetorical question of Rev 6:17. The earth dwellers are in great fear and cannot imagine anyone surviving if further wrath comes from the throne of God and the Lamb. Thus, they ask “who will be able to stand?” Chapter 7 gives two answers from the DVP.

1. 144,000 Israelites who are given a protective seal (7:1-8)
2. A great multitude from every nation who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:9-17)

So, the 144,000 are Israelites and the great multitude are Gentiles. What is the relationship between the 144,000 Jewish witnesses and the great multitude of Gentiles? Some have claimed that the great multitude of Gentiles are the result of the witnessing of the 144,000 (Fruchtenbaum). However, contextually, both the sealing of the 144,000 and the taking to heaven of the great multitude happen between the 6th and 7th seals. Thus, the great multitude that John sees here is not likely a result of the witnessing of the 144,000 since these are already in heaven.

Revelation 7:9-17 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; ¹⁰ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen." ¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. ¹⁶ "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

Revelation 7:9 *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;*

After these things indicates a new vision. John is no longer focused on the four angels holding back the winds of elemental fury or the fifth angel who rose in the east to delay the trumpet judgments to engage in sealing the 144,000 but John says, ***I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count.*** The number is so great it is

astonishing. It should not be inferred that someone attempted to count them, but if someone did, they would be unsuccessful. The **great multitude** is overwhelming. It is not possible for a human to count this number.

Where do they come from? **from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues**. This same phrase was used in Rev 5:10 of redeemed humanity. Here these four appellations are used of Tribulation martyrs. They come **from every nation** (*ethnos*) refers to political affiliation. **tribe** (*phule*) refers to descent or lineage and means close biological connection. **people** (*laos*) refers to race or stock. **tongue** (*glossa*) refers to languages. Thus, people of every political affiliation, lineage, race, and language are represented among the Tribulation martyrs. What is clear is that the persecution and executions of Tribulation saints is taking place on a global scale.

Where are they located? **before the heavenly throne and before the Lamb**. They are clearly in heaven and not on earth. They are within the heavenly throne room described in Rev 4-5 and in the presence of **the Lamb**. They are not immediately around the throne where the four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and other angels are stationed but they are in His remote presence. They who were once ravaged by the earth dwellers now stand secure in the presence of the One whose wrath will judge and avenge their blood.

What is their appearance? They are **clothed in white robes**. These are additions to the martyrs from the first four seals and who stood under the altar during the 5th seal. The number has increased significantly. Rather than having to wait as the first group did, as each martyr enters heaven, he is given a **white robe** upon arrival. All saints will eventually have **white robes** but all non-martyrs will have to wait until the after the Tribulation. The **robes** they are given are *stole*, which is a long robe reaching to the feet, often given due to favoritism (e.g., Joseph). These robes are distributed as a reward to these faithful martyrs. These have reached the highest level of discipleship having paid the ultimate cost of being associated with Christ; physical death for His name. The glorification of martyrdom is a major theme of the Book of Revelation. That the **robes** are **white** signify righteousness, holiness, and purity since these have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. This large company of redeemed have been killed by brutal murders during the period of the first six seals and have escaped entering the Great Tribulation.

What is the significance of the **palm branches...in their hands**? **Palm branches** commonly signify “victory” or “triumph”. **Palm branches** were appropriate at the Triumphal Entry of Christ (John 12:13) as they are at this juncture. This great multitude

is triumphant over the forces of evil and have escaped ultimate doom as well as the Great Tribulation. As a result, this great multitude cries out in verse 10

Revelation 7:10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

and they cry out with a loud voice. They *krazousin*, a present tense verb meaning “***they continually cry out***” and they do so with a ***loud voice***, a *phone megale*. They never stop crying out loudly because of their gratitude to God and the Lamb. They are giving credit where credit is due, to the only One who is Holy and True.

Salvation, they cry, ***to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb***. ***Salvation*** is the chief note of this song. God has delivered them from their persecutors and executioners. They have been set free from the punishment and agony dispensed by the earth dwellers against them and now they stand in the presence of their Deliverer, triumphant. ***Salvation to our God***. Note the possessive. He is not just a distant God but one they possess as their own. God belongs to them. Clearly ***God who sits on the throne*** is the Father. These are the Father’s children clinging to Him in praise, ***and to the Lamb*** who made such a relationship possible. The ***Lamb*** is a term used of the crucified Messiah. “Like a lamb He was led to slaughter” (Isa 53:7) but it is obvious that He is victoriously risen, present in heaven, receiving worship from a vast multitude of martyrs.

Revelation 7:11-12 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

The ***angels*** who ***stand*** in the third ring of beings ***around the throne***, outside of the ***four living creatures*** and the ***twenty-four elders...fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God***. Angels do not experience salvation in the same sense that humans do but they still rejoice over one repentant sinner (Luke 15:10) and they have an intense interest in God’s plan of salvation (1 Pt 1:12). ***They fell on their faces before the throne*** indicates their position of ***worship***. Before such majesty no other response is acceptable. Prostration before the God of salvation and the Lamb.

Their worship begins in verse 12 with the word ***Amen***. This is a word of agreement with the worship of the great multitude in verse 10. They agree that God has demonstrated ***salvation*** by delivering this great multitude from their earthly persecutors to heaven. Next

the *angels* offer a seven-fold doxology of their own similar to other doxologies in the Book of Revelation (cf 4:11; 5:12, 13).

1. **blissing** (*eulogia*) – He is the source of all goodness despite trials and tribulations on earth
2. **glory** (*doxa*) – The weight and radiance of His being as demonstrated by the deliverance
3. **wisdom** (*sophia*) – His omniscience in carrying out the salvation at the appropriate time
4. **thanksgiving** (*eucharistia*) – The gratitude for God’s victorious salvation
5. **honor** (*time*) – The honor received because of His provision of salvation
6. **power** (*dunamis*) – He has delivered this great multitude from the fiercest forces the earth has to offer.
7. **might** (*ischus*) – The inherent strength of His being here demonstrated by taking a great multitude from the grips of the world system into His presence

And all these things are *to our God forever and ever*. This is a continual exaltation of God and the Lamb. The seven-fold doxology closes with an *Amen* signifying that all that was said of God and the Lamb is in perfect agreement with the character of God.

Revelation 7:13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"

Verse 13 begins, oddly enough, with an answer to John in the form of a question. This is a Hebrew idiom that introduces an utterance in light of a fresh set of circumstances. *One of the* twenty-four *elders* says to John, *"These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"* The *elder* directs our attention to the great multitude *clothed in white robes* and asks for their identity and their place of origin.

Revelation 7:14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. ¹⁶ "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

John’s response in verse 14 is kind of like, “Are you asking me?” John does not want to take a stab at this one. Many reasons have been suggested as to why John doesn’t give an

answer. I find that the most convincing is that the sheer number of people may have surprised him since Jesus said, “many are called, few are chosen” (Matt 22:14). Thus, John says, *My lord, you know*. John addresses the *elder* as *lord* but this does not imply deity in this instance. The title here shows respect for the status of the elder. John’s point is “Don’t ask me, you’re the one who knows”. And the elder *said to* John, “*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*” So, the elder answers both questions mentioned in verse 13.

First, question, *who are they?* The elder says they are those who *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*. They are clearly Tribulation Saints not church saints. Everyone who believes from Adam to the end of the Millennium is a “saint”. It is not biblical to say “saints” are a special group of believers. Over 60 times in the NT the word “saint” is applied to every believer. However, there are different groups of saints that maintain their identity as distinct entities. These groups should not be confused.

1. Gentile Saints (Gen 1-11)
2. Jewish Saints (Gen 12-Acts 1:26)
3. Church Saints (Acts 2:1-Rev 3:10)
4. Tribulation Saints (Rev 6:1-19:21)
5. Millennial Saints (Rev 20:1-6)
- 6.

Various Groups of Saints



The *great multitude* are Tribulation Saints. The picture of washing a garment in blood and making it white is odd for Gentile readers of the Bible but it has its background in Gen 49:11 where Judah is said to have washed his “garments in wine” and his robe in “the blood of grapes”. Soiled garments represent sinfulness (Isa. 64:6; Zech. 3:3). Washing a soiled garment in blood symbolizes the removal of sin and the purity that results (Ps 51:7; Isa 1:18). Not just any blood could purify these Tribulation martyrs. Their own blood clearly does not purify them. It must be the *blood of the sacrificial Lamb* that produces the whiteness (cf Rev 1:5; 5:9). The verb *have washed* is aorist tense pointing back to the time when they were on earth and had faith in the *Lamb*. At the moment of *faith*, they were *washed* symbolizing forgiveness, the removal of sin. At the same time their *robes* were *made...white* which is more than forgiveness, this is

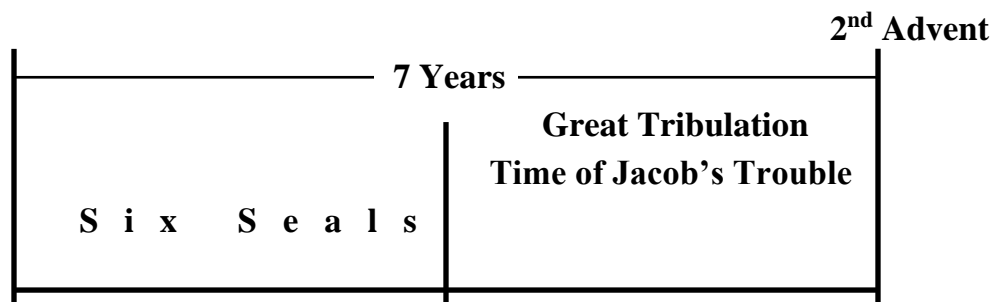
justification. Thus, by faith they were forgiven and credited with a righteousness from God. This all happened while they were still on earth. Now they stand in heaven.

Second question, *from where have they come?* This is the key question for answering when these Tribulation Saints exited earth and entered heaven. Several observations are in order:

1. They are already in heaven before the 7th seal (cf 8:1)
2. The sealing of the 144,000 also occurs before the 7th seal

Thus, we can conclude that these Tribulation Saints are an addition to those martyrs mentioned under the 5th seal in Rev 6:9-11. The martyrs under the 5th seal were killed during the first four seals. Upon reaching heaven they cried out that God would judge and avenge their blood on the earth dwellers. By way of response, God gave them each a white robe and told them it was not time yet because the final number of martyrs had not come in yet. Here we see more of them. Thus, this great multitude of martyrs includes those who were killed during the first four seals as well as those added to their number during the 6th seal. The biggest difficulty for English readers is the elder's response. He says, *These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation*. This is not just any tribulation. The two definite article designates this literally as *the tribulation the great*. This is not just any period of *great tribulation*. Jesus coined the expression *great tribulation* and limited it to the 2nd half of Daniel's 70th Week (Matt 24:15-22; cf Dan 9:27). This period of time is characterized in Matt 24:21 as a period of time when the destruction will be completely unparalleled by anything historically or yet future. The period of the *great tribulation* is also known by another term from the OT, *the time of Jacob's trouble* (Jer. 30:6-7). Of that day it is said it "is great and there is none like it". Since there can only be one time of unparalleled destruction the *great tribulation* and *the time of Jacob's trouble* must refer to the same period of time and according to Jesus it must be the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation.

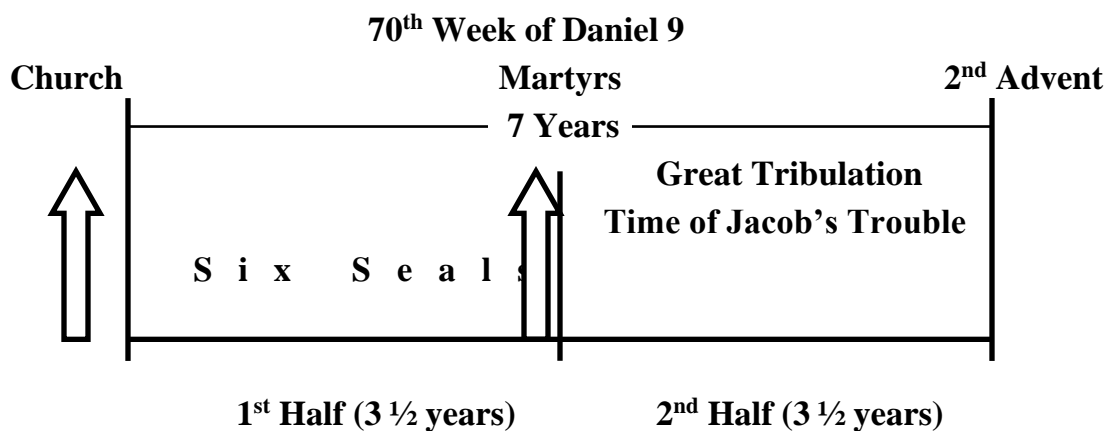
70th Week of Daniel 9



1st Half (3 ½ years)

2nd Half (3 ½ years)

However, if that is the case, it seems like the text is saying these martyrs come out from the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation when I have already told you they came out from the first half during the first six seals. How can this tension be relieved? Grammatically. Two grammatical observations relieve the tension. First, the participle *come*. It is a present middle participle. The present participle should be translated *coming*. Thus, *these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation*. Thus, they have not stopped coming but they are still *coming*. Second, and most importantly, the word *out of*. This is the Greek preposition *ek* which is flexible enough in its meaning to be translated either *out of* or *out from* or even *away from* (UBS). Thus, *These are the ones coming away from the great tribulation*. The sense is that they are taken *out from* the earth before the great tribulation begins! This is not pushing the Greek at all. It is a viable option. It would create a contradiction to say that these clothed in white robes did not exit earth until sometime during the 2nd half of the Tribulation; that is, the Great Tribulation because this great multitude is also composed of those who came out during the first four seals and stood under the altar under the 5th seal. If one tries to relieve this contradiction by moving the seal judgments into the 2nd half of the Tribulation then he fails to harmonize this with Matt 24:5-8 where Jesus describes the seal judgments (Rev 6:1-17) and says they are the ‘beginning of the birth pangs’ (cf 24:8). If one tries to stretch the Great Tribulation to cover the entire seven years (e.g., Fruchtenbaum), then he has the difficulty of dealing with Jesus’ limitation of this expression to the second half in Matt. 24:21. The best solution is to take the preposition *ek* to mean “out from” rather than “out of”. Further support for this, as Newell saw, was *ek* used in Rev 3:10. Pre-trib teachers claim *ek* here means “out from” rather than “out of”. Thus, it is best and most consistent to take *ek* in the same sense in both texts. Thus, church saints will be removed from the earth before the Tribulation begins (Rev 3:10) and these martyrs will be removed from the earth before the Great Tribulation begins (Rev 7:14).



So, we can simply conclude by saying, these are Tribulation Saints who have been forgiven and justified and they came out from earth before the Great Tribulation begins. Thus, they are protected from the further Trumpet and Bowl Judgments by way of removal prior to their occurrence. Thus, the earth-dwellers question in 6:17, ***who will be able to stand?*** has been answered.

1. 144,000 Jewish witnesses are given a protective seal to survive the judgments
2. A great multitude of saints have been removed before the judgments are released

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