

Revelation 6:9 7:17 - Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

When most people think of the Book of Revelation, they think of strange visions of future judgment.

But as we've seen, the first 5 chapters are John's visions of Jesus in glory and His messages to 7 churches located in the Roman province of Asia.

Ch. 6 commences his visions of future judgment.

In chapter 5 John is given a vision of Jesus Christ taking possession of the title deed to Earth.

It is His right to take it because Jesus reclaimed mankind's lost dominion at the Cross.

It's important we realize that what John sees in ch. 5 is *yet future* for us.

Don't forget, ch. 4 opens with John being *Raptured* up to heaven. This is yet future for us – so what John goes on to see in chs. 4 & 5 is ahead for us.

What John saw, you and I will see *with our own eyes*.

We will see the throne of God the Father & He seated there!
We'll see the 24 elders on lesser throne surrounding God's throne.

We'll see the 4 living ones, the *cherubim* who hover like an honor guard around God.

Then we'll hear a mighty angel proclaim with a loud voice that the time is running out on the period in which Earth can be redeemed.

As we watch, we'll see Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Root of David.

He will approach the throne of the Father who holds in His right hand a scroll sealed with 7 seals – this scroll is the title deed to earth.

When we look at Jesus, we'll see the evidence & proof of His worthiness to take the scroll – for we'll see the marks of the crucifixion.

Then He will take the scroll, and begin the procedure for laying claim of that which rightfully belongs to Him – Planet earth –

and the treasure it contains – the Human Race!
But there's a problem, an enemy who will oppose Him – Satan will not just turn over dominion of Earth.
He will resist and enlist rebel man in his rebellion.
As Jesus breaks each of the 7 seals, we see the opposition of the devil and the rebellion of mankind intensify.
As we saw last week, when Jesus breaks the first seal, the antichrist begins his career.
When Jesus breaks the second seal, wars intensify.
When the third seal is broken, famine sweeps across the earth.
And when the fourth seal is rent, death claims a quarter of the world's population.
As we come now to v. 9 of chapter 6, we see the 5th seal broken.

CHAPTER 6

9When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

With the breaking of the 5th seal, John's perspective is moved to heaven.

The altar John sees here is the *Golden Altar* of incense which represents the prayers of God's people. (8:3,5; 9:13)

Under this altar, John sees the *souls* of those who have been martyred for their faith in Christ.

Why are they *under* the altar?

In Exodus 29:12 & Lev. 4:7, Moses instructed the priests they were to pour the blood of the sacrifices at the *base* of the altar.

The OT repeatedly affirms that the *life* is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11, 14 Deuteronomy 12:23).

The picture here in Rev. 6 is that the martyrs have offered themselves to God, and as they were put to death on Earth, He secreted them to a special place in heaven.

The question is – who are these martyrs?

Do they represent *all* those who have been put to death for their faith in Christ, or just those martyred *during* the Tribulation?

Well, remember, as John stands in heaven, he represents the

Church which has been raptured.

He stands in the position and views things from the perspective *we* will when *we're* raptured.

And he doesn't see *himself* as being under the altar; he sees these souls there.

So it's probably best to understand these martyrs as believers who are put to death for their faith *during* the Tribulation.

We see them immediately *after* the 4 horsemen whose career brings terror and death on an unprecedented scale.

In Rev. 13:15, they're referred to as those who would not worship the antichrist and so are killed.

In 20:4 & 18:24, they're described as all those who are killed through beheading during the Tribulation.

In Rev. 13:7 we're told the antichrist is *given power* to make war with the *saints* and to prevail.

But that stands in contrast to Jesus's remarks to the disciples when He said that the gates of hell will not prevail against the *Church*. (Matt. 16:18)

So this class of martyrs seems to *not* be a part of the *Church Proper*.

Indeed, they're Tribulation saints - people who will come to faith in Christ, but *after* the Church has been Raptured.

And that's why John sees their *souls* under the altar.

They haven't received their resurrection bodies yet – as the Church has in the rapture .

Tribulation saints won't receive *their* resurrection bodies till the end of the Tribulation.

Make no mistake, many people will come to faith in Christ *after* the rapture.

Think of all those you've witnessed to!

Think of all the Bibles left behind with your notes scribbled in the margin, taken tonight and every Wednesday night as we study through Revelation.

Maybe you ought to pen a note to a specific relative or friend who may end up looking for your Bible when suddenly you're gone and they realize everything you've been telling them is TRUE!

As we read on we'll see that there will be a mighty evangelistic force God will raise up during the Tribulation – and this army of witnesses will lead thousands, if not millions to faith in Christ.

The problem is – the persecution & martyrdom that has been the hallmark of Historic Christianity will explode exponentially during the Tribulation period.

Later we will see why the Tribulation saints are put to death.

They stand in the way of the antichrist's plans.

He kills them because he's inspired & empowered by the devil and the world will join him in his persecution.

Is it hard to believe that civilized people will kill people simply because of their religious beliefs?

It shouldn't be – after all, history is replete with examples of religious hatred.

We're seeing it today in Islam's war on Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism.

We even have an historical precedent for the political and religious persecution and martyrdom of Christians on a widespread scale.

During the days of the early Church, several Roman Emperors blamed the woes of the Empire on the *blasphemy* of the Christians.

They said that because the Christians believed in only one God, they were irreverent atheists and that this had ticked off the gods who had sent plagues, famine, and pestilence to trouble the Earth.

Therefore, the best things that could be done was to kill the Christians to appease the gods.

One historian wrote that when the rivers rose and flooded – the Christians were blamed.

When the rivers subsided and dried up, the Christians were blamed.

They were made the scapegoat of *every* trouble and the cry was frequently heard – “Off with the atheists! Kill the Christians!”

And of course, Hitler blamed the Jews for all the problems of Germany; said they were hindering the evolution of the Aryan race; so he devised the *Final Solution*.

Well, it will happen again.

The Antichrist will convince the world that the Christians are standing in the way of achieving a new *Golden Age*.

In John 16:2 Jesus said, “The day will come when everyone who puts you to death will think he is doing God a favor.”

10 And they [the souls under the altar] cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Here’s a clue that these souls are martyred Tribulation saints.

The people who killed them are called “*earth-dwellers*.”

This is a phrase we encounter 7 times in Revelation which speaks specifically of rebel mankind *during* the Tribulation.

They aren’t the *heaven-bound*, they are the *earth-dwellers*.

The martyrs ask God when they will be avenged.

Now, we don’t normally think of God’s people asking for vengeance – but note that these martyrs don’t exact revenge themselves; they leave it to God.

The sweetest revenge of all is to see those who persecuted, won to faith in Christ.

But if they won’t yield to the Lord, then they *will know* His justice.

God is greatly concerned that innocent blood is avenged.

(Numbers 35:33)

11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed*.

The martyrs asked about *when* their tormentors would know the justice of God.

They’re told to wait until their number is filled up, which won’t take long.

In the meantime, they’re given *white robes*.

Since they have to wait till the end of the Tribulation to receive their resurrection bodies, they’re given temporary vessels in which to dwell, which are these white robes.

In Rev. 7:14 & 19:8, the white robes speak of the righteousness which is imputed to us through faith in Jesus.

12I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. ¹³And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. ¹⁴Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

When Jesus breaks the 6th seal there's great cosmic upheaval on earth and in the heavens.

One thing man has always been able to count on is the *sturdiness* of the earth and the *steadfastness* of the heavens.

There *have been* sporadic disturbances by earthquakes and comets, but these pass and life quickly gets back to normal.

With the breaking of the 6th seal, the age-old steadfastness of the Earth and Heavens is dealt a serious blow.

Some commentators take these verses to be symbolic of nations and governments in upheaval, and there's certainly going to be plenty of that during the Tribulation.

But we should take what John writes here as literally as possible unless the text gives us concrete reasons for *thinking* it's symbolic.

What John describes here was foretold by the OT prophets as signs that would precede the day of God's wrath (Joel 2:2, 10-11 30-31 Isa. 13:6-13 34:1-4 Amos 8:9-10)

Also, John doesn't say what he saw was *like* a great earthquake, or *like* the stars falling from the sky.

He says that's what he saw!

In Luke 21:25-26, Jesus spoke of this time:

And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of

heaven will be shaken.

John says there was a *great earthquake*.

This is the first of three that will shake the Earth during the Tribulation. (Rev. 6:12; 11:13; 16:18-19)

Several OT prophecies associated the end of the age with a powerful earthquake. (Zech 14:4-5; cf. Ezek 38:20; Amos 8:8)

What God is doing with the breaking of the 6th seal is *intervening directly now* in the affairs of Earth – and in vs. 15-17, we see that the people of the earth recognize as much . . .

15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

The earthquake and it's aftermath wake the world up to the reality that God is angry and that what's happening now on Earth is the direct result of His judgement on their rebellion.

But notice; instead of repenting, they attempt to hide, as if they could get away from God's sight.

V. 12 begins with a great earthquake and v. 14 ends with the words, **. . . and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.**

The disturbances in the heavens can probably be seen as the result of this massive earthquake.

Whenever there's a devastating earthquake in an urban area, the fires that break out are massive!

Far more damage was done in the San Francisco earthquake from fire than from the shaking.

An earthquake that shifts mountains off their base and sinks islands is going to bring massive devastation in fires and send up enough smoke and pollution into the atmosphere that the light of the sun will be darkened and the moonlight will be

turned to the color of blood.

I remember years ago when there were several huge brushfires in Southern CA and the sky was filled with a hazy smoke. At night, the moonlight was a sickly reddish as it shone through the haze.

When the light of the sun is described as being darkened like sackcloth of hair, it simply means the light of the sun is diminished, *not* cut off.

Sackcloth is a *loose weave*, and cloth made of hair is *porous*.

Darkness was another Old Testament judgment, and is foretold as being a special mark of the final judgments (Ex 10:21-23; Isaiah 50:3 Isaiah 13:9-10; 24:23; Ezek 32:7-8; Amos 5:18; 8:9)

In addition to the darkening of the sun & moon, John says the stars will fall from the sky.

The image he paints is of a fruit tree with much ripe fruit.

A storm comes and the winds whip through it's branches, causing it to cast it's fruit to the ground like missiles.

More than likely, John is describing a meteor shower.

But instead of these meteors burning up in the atmosphere as they typically do, they make it all the way to earth.

If you've ever been to *Meteor Crater* near Winslow, AZ then you know just how much damage a meteor can do.

The crater is 1 mile wide and 600 feet deep.

Scientists say that the debris kicked up by its impact would have scattered into atmosphere, and blocked the light of the sun and moon for some time.

Some believe the impact was enough to twist and slightly distort the rotation of earth.

It may have even caused a polar shift; there is some evidence for this in the rocks.

You've probably heard about the meteor strike in Tunguska, Siberia on June 30, 1908, that leveled millions of acres of forest and caused a massive earthquake.

If this happened on a greater scale, say a meteor *shower*, the face of the earth would be changed overnight.

When these things happen, global panic sets in - fear grips the earth. People realize the source of the trouble; it's God's *judgment*.

So they do the smart thing; they *repent* !

Nope - they hide! Real intelligent!

Do they really think the God who possesses the power to shake the earth and fling house-size rocks to the earth can't see where they're hiding?

John's description of who tries to hide reveals that the disturbances of vs. 12-14 aren't merely symbolic of civil governments.

If they were, then you wouldn't have the kings of the Earth and the great men trying to hide.

They'd be the one to benefit from war and strife.

But John makes it clear – *everyone*, from the least to the greatest is dumbstruck with terror over what's happening to the Earth.

In an earthquake or meteor shower, being a king or rich man helps you not one bit!

Their cry is interesting.

They say, "Hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

That's an interesting phrase – the wrath of the Lamb.

The image of an angry young sheep seems incongruous; after all, a lamb is the epitome and picture of peace and meekness.

But that's the point – John saw Jesus as the Lamb who had taken the scroll.

It's the Lamb who's opening the seals.

And this 6th seal means the title deed to Earth is just about to be put into effect.

The Lamb will now morph into the Lion who will come to do battle with His enemies.

They ask a very important question: "Who is able to stand in the day of the Lamb's wrath?"

The answer is, "No one!"

So God has provided *a way of escape* from His wrath.

That way of escape is through faith in Christ.

1 Thess. 5:9 says

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Rom. 5 we read this –

Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (1-2/ 8-9)

We've had two groups of people presented to us here in the last half of ch. 6.

When the 5th seal is opened, we see a group in heaven, under the altar, calling for God's vengeance.

When the 6th seal is opened, we see a group on earth, underground, calling out for protection in the *midst* of God's vengeance.

But there is no shelter from God's justice except through faith in Christ.

One day that justice will shake the earth and the heavens, and if you aren't in Christ, there will be no place to hide.

When the pioneers were moving west and settling the Prairie states, they would occasionally have to deal with the ravages of fire.

Those prairie fires could come up so fast and move so swiftly with the winds there was no way to outrun them.

The only way to avoid them was to quickly burn out an area around where you were standing.

Then stand in the middle of the burned out area as the prairie fire swept past.

This is a fitting picture of God's judgment and our salvation in Christ.

One day, God will send the fires of His perfect justice to sweep across our planet, burning up all evil and unrighteousness.

No one will be able to hide or outrun that judgment.

The only way to be saved is to center yourself in the burned out place of God's judgment in Christ.

You see, that's what the cross is all about – it's the place where our sins were fully paid for by Jesus.

You can pay for your own sins and suffer through God's *damning* judgment on the last day, or you can believe in Christ's saving judgment, and find refuge and safety in the cross.

Please don't make the mistake that so many make – of thinking that because God's judgment hasn't come *so far*, it won't come. John's visions make it clear – that Day of Judgment is coming; it's inevitable.

Today we wait – today is the day of salvation.

But the clock is ticking out on today.

One of the questions that confronts the student of Revelation is – how are we to understand the 7 seals, and then the 7 trumpets and 7 bowls?

Are they *sequential & chronological* or *comprehensive*, covering all of the Tribulation?

Bible scholars tend to be split pretty evenly on this.

And the reason why is because there's a bit of both in them.

What I mean is, there's a loose chronology to the 7 seals, trumpets and bowls.

After all, the 7th seal *is* the 7 trumpets while the 7th trumpet *is* the 7 bowls.

But we ought not think that each one of these things happens and ends, and then the next one begins.

Each event occurs, and then its effects carry on throughout the rest of the Tribulation period.

So when the first seal is broken, we see the emergence of the antichrist.

How long is his career? Through to the end of the Tribulation.

The second seal is broken and we see war descend upon the earth.

It isn't hard to see that this is the state of affairs that lasts up to the very end and the Battle of Armageddon.

The third seal is broken and we see the issuance of famine.

Once more, this is a state of affairs that will begin not long after the onset of the Tribulation but will get progressively worse right up to the end.

And so it goes for the rest of the seals, trumpets and bowls.

The idea is that as the 7 years of the Tribulation pass, God keeps turning up the heat on the Earth-dwellers.

At each phase of judgment, some of them forsake their rebellion and come to faith in Jesus Christ.

When no more are to be saved in that phase of judgment, God turns up the heat a bit more and a few *more* are saved.

This happens again and again in repeated cycles of judgment until the full number of Tribulation saints is full and all that's left are hard-boiled rebels who are in full union with the antichrist. In Chapter 7, we see how people come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation.

CHAPTER 7

¹After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ²Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

The phrase “the four corners of the earth” is an ancient way of referring to North, South, East, & West.

And before some hypercritical skeptic slams the Bible for the use of this phrase, saying, “Look, when this was written they thought the Earth was flat! So God can't have inspired it,” let's admit that the Bible often uses what we call phenomenological figures of speech to describe everyday things.

Does that same skeptic call up the local weatherman for saying that sunrise is going to be at 5:37 A.M. and sunset at 8:25 P.M.? Hardly!

Does he call the local armed forces recruiting office and challenge their use of the phrase, “See the four corners of the earth” on a recruiting poster? No.

V. 1 is a short interlude of mercy in the judgments of God.

These 4 angels who hold the winds are going to release them in fury upon the earth.

But first they stay them so that the servants of God can be identified and marked.

Today, the supreme symbol of destruction is the mushroom cloud of a nuclear explosion.

In the ancient world the supreme symbol of destruction was a

storm like a cyclone or tornado.

When I was about 7 years old, living in one of the suburbs of Chicago, a tornado wne t through our neighborhood in the middle of the night.

I can't describe the utter terror I and my family were in as we huddled in our basement bathroom.

In the OT, winds spoke of God's judgment. (Jer. 49:36 51:1)

And here in Revelation, God is about to pour out His judgment as a storm upon the earth, sea, and trees.

But first, there's a pause to show mercy.

There once was a politician who had his pictures taken but didn't like any of the proofs so he returned them to photographer with the complaint, "These pictures don't do me justice!"

The photographer replied, "Sir, with a face like yours, you don't want justice, you want mercy."

God is about to pour out another wave of judgment, but before He does, He looks in mercy and grace to those who look to Him.

In the ancient world, *seals* were a part of everyday life.

They showed ownership and stood as legal marks of authority & authenticity.

An item that was sealed bore a mark of identity, purpose, and belonging.

A seal was usually a metal ring or stamp that bore a unique image.

Wax was dripped onto a document or item and then as the wax hardened, the seal was pressed into it, leaving behind the image of the seal.

John sees an angel come forward who possesses the seal of God.

What form this seal takes we aren't told.

But the angel addresses the 4 angels holding the winds and tells them they are not to let go of those winds until the servants of God have been properly affixed with the mark of God.

Now, what is this seal - is it a visible or invisible mark?

We don't know but one thing is certain - God can see it!

Those who are sealed belong to Him - they are His servants, His people.

In Eze. 9:1-11 we read how God sent angelic messengers to judge the wicked of Jerusalem.

But prior to judgment a man with a marker went through the city

and marked those who were faithful to God in their foreheads. When the judgment came, those who bore the mark of God were protected.

What we're reading about here in Revelation 7 finds its origin in this story from Ezekiel.

What's interesting is that the mark placed on the foreheads of the people in Ezekiel 9 was a mark in the shape of a "t"; a small cross.

This seal placed on the foreheads of the servants of God seems to be a mark of *protection* from the judgments that are coming.

These servants make up a special group of Tribulation saints who have a unique ministry of narrating what's happening in the judgments of God that are coming on the earth.

They proclaim the gospel at the same time, telling people all they must do to be saved is to repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ.

A bit later on we'll see that Satan is going to try to counterfeit this seal of God on *his* followers in the last days.

In fact most people think of this counterfeit mark when they think of a mark on the forehead.

But Satan only *mimics* what God does.

In Isa. 14 Lucifer boasts, "I will be like the Most High."

The devil can't *create* anything; only God can *create*.

But Satan is a master at *perversion* so he *twists* and *distorts* and makes his counterfeit.

The Antichrist will give his followers a mark in mimicking God's seal on the forehead of His servants.

4And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

Here's a passage which has been badly abused throughout the ages.

It seems every new group that comes along claims to be this 144,000.

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that *their elite* are the 144,000.

In fact, they believe that only this group are *born again* and will be able to get in to heaven and that it's comprised of only the very most holy and devoted of those in the Watchtower organization.

They believe the number was filled up some time ago and so the best the rest of the JW's can hope for is to live on the restored Earth but they'll never make it to heaven.

In the Jehovah's Witness services, they serve communion, but the only people they allow to take it are members of the 144,000. Since they believe most of those people have already died and passed on, the plate goes round and no one takes of the elements.

I've thought it would be fun to attend one of their services and when the plate comes round, take of it – after all, I'm born again and I know I'm going to heaven.

Herbert W. Armstrong claimed the serious members of his World Wide Church of God comprised the 144,000.

Serious members were those who give double and triple tithes, in a kind of “buy your way to heaven” scheme.

Armstrong promised that the WWCG would send telegrams when Jesus was about to come again so they could flee to the wilderness where a camp was set up for them.

The Seventh Day Adventists claim to be the 144,000, and on and on it goes.

Just who are we to understand this group to be?

First = they are called “the servants of God” in v.3.

Second = it's clear they're *Jews*; literal descendants of Jacob.

We just are allowed any other understanding.

It's as if the Holy Spirit knew this would prove to be a passage of contention, so He spelled it out and John wrote that they are “**of all the tribes of the children of Israel.**”

Note that – it's not just “the tribes of Israel” but “the tribes **of the children** of Israel.”

Now, lest there be ANY doubt as to who John means – he adds -

- 5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;**
- 6 of the tribe of Asher - of the tribe of Naphtali - of the
tribe of Manasseh**
- 7 of the tribe of Simeon Levi Issachar ⁸Zebulun Joseph ---**

of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.

There are 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel who make up this 144,000.

Since the records of Jewish family lineage were lost in the destruction of the temple, it's virtually impossible for Jews to track their tribal affiliation today.

But this doesn't hinder God's knowledge.

He knows who's who and will set aside a special group of 144,000 for a unique task.

It's in chapter 14 that we find out what this task is.

We learn that they are protected and triumphant through the period of God's wrath, meeting with Jesus at Mount Zion at His return (Revelation 14:1).

They remain celibate (Revelation 14:4).

They're the beginning of a great harvest of the saved during the Tribulation (Revelation 14:4).

They're marked by surpassing integrity and faithfulness (Revelation 14:5).

The more you investigate this group, the clearer it becomes that this is a group of Jewish men who come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation and who end up becoming instrumental as a mighty evangelistic force.

They are divinely marked and protected by God from the judgments that are falling on earth, and for a time from the opposition and persecution of the antichrist.

They are the beginning harvest of the salvation of Israel foretold in Romans 11:1,26 & Matthew 23:37-39.

In looking over the list of tribes given in vs. 5-8 some have noticed some omissions.

The tribe of Dan is left out – and the question is why?

Some think it's because Dan is the tribe the Antichrist will emerge from.

They get this from Daniel 11:37 and Jeremiah 8:16.

This may or may not be the case, but one thing is certain, Dan was the tribe responsible for introducing *idolatry* into the nation of Israel and the Book of Judges makes abundantly clear.

While Dan is *omitted* from this listing of tribes, we see the wonder

of God's redemption in that he's the first tribe mentioned in Ezekiel 48's roll call of the tribes in the Millennial Kingdom. The other omission in this list is *Ephraim*:

Actually, Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of Joseph, the grandsons of Jacob.

Manasseh is mentioned in v. 6, and Joseph, his father in v. 8.

So why is Joseph's name substituted for Ephraim's?

Well, like Dan, Ephraim was responsible for leading the nation of Israel into gross idolatry. (Hosea 4:17)

If the antichrist comes from the tribe of Dan, it's possible the false prophet, whom we'll read about later, arises from the tribe of *Ephraim*.

⁹After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

This group stands in clear contrast with the 144,000 of the tribes of Israel.

This group cannot be numbered and finds its origin in all the nations.

They are arrayed in *white robes*, which reminds us of the souls under the altar in ch. 6.

But here we see them with *palm branches* in their hands and instead of being under the altar, they stand before the throne singing praises instead of asking for justice on their persecutors.

The palm branch gives us a clue as to who this group is.

Palm branches were symbols in the ancient world of victory.

They were handed to warriors who had returned home after a successful campaign and were parading through the street to the acclamation of the people.

They were handed to the winning athlete as he took his victory lap around the track, much as people will throw flowers onto the track or the ice after a runner or skater has finished their event.

This crowd represents the full number of martyrs and Tribulation saints who have come out of the Great Tribulation.

They are the fruit and harvest of the evangelistic army of vs. 4-8.

V. 9 reminds us that no small number of people will come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation.

Friends, don't stop telling people about the Lord.

You may not see their conversion *before* the Rapture, but trust that once we've gone, they will remember what you shared and come to faith.

I've toyed with the idea of making a video or at least a booklet for those who are left behind, much like in the book *Left Behind* by Jenkins and LaHaye.

It might make a great evangelistic tool.

This great host sings, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

This will be part of my message for Sunday, so I'll leave further comment till then.

11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.*"

When the great multitude worshiped God the whole host of heaven join them.

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know."

So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will

dwell among them. ¹⁶They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

It was important for John to know the *identity* of this great multitude. But he didn't know that he should ask, so one of the elders prompts him.

John very wisely defers to the elder who tells them these are those who come to faith during the Great Tribulation.

In the Greek grammar of this passage, “the” is emphatic.

This was a time of *great tribulation* for this multitude.

This is the full-up number of those spoken of in 6:11 – Note the wording there –

Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of their fellow servants* [in 7:15 we're told they serve God day and night in His temple] and their *brethren*, [meaning they are fellow believers] **who would be killed as they were, was completed.**

We'll stop there tonight because we'll be looking at the rest of this chapter on Sunday.