

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter marks the beginning of judgments being released upon the earth, which is generally viewed as the “Great Tribulation.” Some scholars believe it also marks the beginning of the “Day of the Lord” when God punishes the world for its wickedness. And some believe it is the beginning of the “Day of Christ” when Christians are “caught up” into heaven to be with the Lord (also called the Rapture). It is important to note that not all who believe in the Rapture agree on its timing. Some believe Christians will be “caught up” prior to the Tribulation and will avoid all the suffering. Others believe it will happen at some midway point and that we will have to endure some of the dreadful things which will come upon the earth. And still others see it happening at the end when Christ returns in the clouds with glory immediately before the final punishments are poured out upon the world. Likewise, while almost everyone believes that the “Great Tribulation,” the “Day of the Lord,” and the “Day of Christ” are all integrally linked, not all believe they are all the same event. Before we can move forward into chapters 6 through 18, which depict great punishments being released upon the earth, we must first sort out the time line of the Tribulation, Day of the Lord, and Day of Christ.

In the letter to the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10 Jesus says: ***“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.”*** This would indicate that at least some Christians will be taken home prior to the Tribulation or “hour of testing.” But it is revealed to us in 1 Peter 4:12 that some will suffer in the “testing.” Peter says: ***“Behold, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.”*** Peter equates the “testing” as sharing in the “sufferings of Christ.” Peter’s words could also be seen to suggest that this time of testing will lead up to ***“the revelation of His glory,”*** which could be seen as His second coming in glory. While this may be completely true at the end, I believe each of us, regardless of the time in which we live, will be tested in our faith and required to demonstrate that we belong to Christ.

Our time on earth is a time of testing and preparation for the eternity we will live with Christ. Scripture consistently and clearly indicates throughout the Bible that God will always be with us and will at some point deliver us. But Scripture does not give us a clear and certain point in which our deliverance will be accomplished other than the moment of deliverance we all share upon the Cross with Jesus. There is some evidence to suggest that God will deliver us at different times according to His will. What is most important of all is the assurance that God will deliver us.

Regarding the Tribulation period, there is substantial Scriptural evidence that this is the period of time immediately preceding the “Day of the Lord,” and described in Revelation chapter 6. The parallel between the breaking of the first six seals and the “Apocalyptic Discourses” found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 17 and 21 are very similar. Matthew 24 provides the clearest correlation. The pivotal event of the sixth seal seems to separate the “Great Tribulation” from the “Day of the Lord.” In the Old Testament the “Day of the Lord” is always seen as a great and terrible day of punishment. Isaiah 13: 6 and 9 read as follows: *“Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty...Behold the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it.”* In the New Testament we hear a similar description found in 2 Peter 3:10, saying, *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”* Clearly, the “Day of the Lord” is not simply a time of testing but a time of utter destruction. Joel 2:31 gives us insight into the division point between the “Tribulation” period and the “Day of the Lord,” saying, *“The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”* Matthew 24:29-30 gives us our most definitive sign regarding the separation between “Tribulation” and the “Day of the Lord.” Jesus says: *“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and glory.”* The people of the earth mourn because the

glory of Christ is now revealed and the time of punishment has arrived. During the Tribulation Christians will suffer at the hands of non-believers, but afterward Christ will be revealed to the whole world, and then the believers will be “gathered up” and the non-believers punished.

I have already said that many Christians believe that God will “Rapture” them off the earth prior to any of the events listed in the Book of Revelation. Others believe that they will have to enter this time of trial and testing but will ultimately be delivered by God. Psalm 91 testifies that God will protect His children from harm during a time of punishment of the wicked. This may be describing the Day of the Lord in Revelation. Psalm 91:1, 5-8 reads: ***“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty... You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day; of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not approach you. You will only look on with your eyes, and see the recompense of the wicked.”*** This description does not sound like a view from heaven but from someone on earth witnessing the destruction up close. We must remember that God is consistent throughout the Bible in both word and action. In the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot cannot reach the safety of the mountains so God grants him safety in the small town of Zoar located within the valley of Sodom and Gomorrah. God protects him where he is even though it is within the valley of destruction (Genesis 19). Likewise, when God rained down the ten plagues upon Egypt to force Pharaoh to release God’s people, the first three plagues were suffered by all, both Egyptians and Hebrews. But beginning with the fourth plague God made a distinction and protected God’s people from the plagues that from that point on would only afflict the Egyptians (Exodus 9:4). Therefore, through the lens of the Old Testament we can see that God sometimes allows His own children to suffer in the process of separating what is His from what is wicked. But at some point God always protects His own and punishes the wicked. With all of this in mind let us now enter the sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation and discover the time of testing we may have to suffer through before God delivers us or protects us from the wrath He will pour out upon the wicked.

Revelation 6:1, states: ***“And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come!””*** It may be important to point out that many early manuscripts read, ***“Come and see!”*** rather than just ***“Come!”*** This applies also to Revelation 6:3, 5 and 7. The distinction in meaning would suggest that rather than the plague being called forward to occur, John is being called forward to see what is going to happen in the future. It is also important to note the similar pattern in the breaking of the first four seals, each having a different living creature declaring, ***“Come!”*** or ***“Come and see!”*** This may distinguish the first four seals and plagues as a set, and indeed each of the first four bring forth something destructive intended to hurt and perhaps also “test” the people of the earth, separating those who believe from those who do not believe in Jesus as their Lord.

Revelation 6:2, states: ***“And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer.”*** When Jesus’ disciples asked Him, ***“What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?”*** (Matthew 24:3), Jesus answered them with a series of events or signs that would come. These signs have a strong correlation with the events described in the breaking of the seals in Revelation 6. The first sign Jesus provides His disciples is a warning, saying, ***“See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many”*** (Matthew 24:4-5). Satan does not create but often attempts to duplicate God in order to confuse and mislead God’s people. In the case of the Exodus from Egypt, remember that Pharaoh’s magicians were able to duplicate many of the early signs which came from God in order to discredit God. In Revelation 19:11 we hear that Christ will return on a “white horse.” The rider of the white horse in 6:2 is the “antichrist,” who comes pretending to be Christ in order to deceive many and lead them into destruction. The antichrist comes ***“conquering, and to conquer”*** but he cannot prevail as “conqueror” because he is not the Christ, who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Therefore, the first seal and the first plague is not a physical plague which destroys the body but a spiritual plague that destroys souls.

It is important to note that the first horseman of the apocalypse, which is widely believed to be the antichrist, may not be a “future” event but may have already begun. We know from Scripture that John believed the “spirit of the antichrist” to already be

present in the world. John warned his contemporaries, saying, ***“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour”*** (1 John 2:18). John clarifies that the antichrist is recognized by its opposition to Jesus, saying, ***“and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world”*** (1 John 4:3). And just as Jesus had warned deceivers who would come, John verifies, saying, ***“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist”*** (2 John 1:7). While it seems clear that the “spirit” of antichrist has been present from the time John lived, this does not mean the first horseman has been riding all this time. John sees the release of the horseman as a future event, beyond his own time. The breaking of the first seal must “release” a more powerful presence or personification of the antichrist, a deceptive force which will deceive many people over a more compressed time frame. Paul speaks of a coming of the “man of lawlessness” who is the “son of destruction” and is in Paul’s time “restrained.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10, Paul writes: ***“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”*** Does the appearance or coming

of the “man of lawlessness” and “son of destruction” coincide with the first horseman of the apocalypse? One could argue that we live in such a time when the “spirit of the antichrist” is manifesting itself in a multitude of ways and reeking havoc, causing many to fall away from the faith. Most Christians can clearly see the spirit of the one who opposes Christ is present in the world. Does that mean the lawless one has appeared? Does the Antichrist have to be identified as a specific person for his presence not to be recognized? Does the first horseman already ride?

Revelation 6:3-4, states: ***“And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come!” And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.”*** The second sign given in Matthew 24 involves war. Jesus says in Matthew 24:6-7a: ***“And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place first, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...”*** What I believe Jesus is saying is that His disciples should not be afraid when they hear of wars and/or wars come because this is not the sign. The sign will be when war breaks out between nations and kingdoms, which many interpret to mean “world wars” such as those we experienced in the Twentieth Century. This correlation is reinforced by the fact that the events of WW-1 and WW-2 lead to the restoration of Israel as a nation, which is also a sign to proceed the return of Christ. Wars have always been with us, but beginning with WW-1 and following, the scale and scope of war and its resulting death and destruction is unprecedented in all of human history.

Revelation 6:5-6, states: ***“And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.””*** Again going back to Matthew 24, the next words Jesus spoke to His disciples were, ***“and in various places there will be famines...”*** (Matthew 24:7b). The quote contained in verse 6 above provides evidence that the third plague will be famine. A denarius was a small silver coin which was equivalent to the ordinary wage for a day’s labor (Matthew 20:2).

The wage for a day's labor would provide enough for a man to feed his entire family. A denarius as the price for a quart of wheat or three quarts of barley would be 8 to 16 times the normal price. These are famine prices and the scale held by the rider perhaps an indication that grain was so scarce and dear that it had to be weighed very carefully. Regarding the scales, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of hard times when food is so scarce it will be measured, saying, ***“And your food which you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight; you shall eat it from time to time. And the water you drink will be the sixth part of a hin by measure; you shall drink it from time to time... Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror”*** (Ezekiel 4:10, 11 & 16). Regarding the reference to not harming the ***“oil and the wine”***, these are items only the wealthy could afford. The implication may be that the rich and the wealthy will continue to have plenty but the poor will suffer. The prophet Amos speaks of a time when the rich will cheat the poor, saying, ***“When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell grain, and the sabbath, that we may open the wheat market, to make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, and to cheat with dishonest scales, so as to buy the helpless for money and the needy for a pair of sandals, and that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?”*** (Amos 8:5-6). It could be surmised that during the tribulation period the poor in poor nations will suffer the greatest due to famine, while the rich in rich nations will not suffer at all. Billy Graham in his book, “Storm Warning” states that there is more famine in the world today than ever before, but if the money we currently spend on weapons was used to feed the hungry, all would have plenty to eat. When I hear in Amos' words above the cry: ***“When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, that we may open the wheat market...”*** I am reminded of the old “Blue Law” that prohibited commerce on Sundays. It was repealed that commerce may take place on the Lord's Day. Has the time Amos spoke of arrived?

Revelation 6:7-8, states: ***“And when He broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”*** The color of the horse

translated here as “ashen” actually means “sickly pale” or the “greenish” color of a bloodless corpse. Also important in the imagery is the fact that the riders name is “Death” and that “Hades” follows closely behind. Revelation 20:14, states: ***“And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”*** We are told that authority was given to “them,” both Death and Hades to kill a fourth of those living on the earth. The inclusion of “Hades” may imply that this will be both a physical and spiritual death event in that those who die will die separated from Christ. We already know that preceding the fourth plague have already come war and famine. Death is the anticipated result of war and famine, but the implication is that even more will be involved. Returning again to Matthew 24, we hear Jesus say: ***“And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold”*** (Matthew 24:10-12). This sounds like a time of deception and death, both physical and spiritual. Within our own society and around the world we have seen a sharp increase in “lawlessness” and people acting like “wild beasts” without conscience as they abuse and prey on one another. An apparent continuing breakdown of moral values is leading to an increase in pain and suffering. While physical death of a fourth of the earth is not apparent, spiritual death seems wide spread and increasing within the world we live.

The four judgments revealed in the breaking of the first four seals are not something new which has never been revealed before. God has previously spoken of these things. One of the clearest accounts, which is consistent both with Matthew 24 and Revelations 6 is found in Ezekiel 14:21, which says, ***“For thus says the Lord God, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man and beast from it!”***” It is important to note that Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish faith and the location of God’s temple and throne. To be cut off from Jerusalem would equate to being cut off from God. Therefore, beginning with the first seal marking the coming of the antichrist, and proceeding to the fourth seal when Death and Hades work together, this will be a period of time that will result in death to many people’s faith in God. It will be a time of great testing and persecution for Christians.

Revelation 6:9-11, states: ***“And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.”*** Returning again to Matthew 24 we hear Jesus tell His disciples: ***“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name”*** (Matthew 24:9). The breaking of the fifth seal clearly informs us that Christians will be alive and many will be put to death during the Tribulation period. We should also understand that death may not simply come through execution by non-believers because we are Christian. Rather, because we are called to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:11), we will often put ourselves in harm’s way out of love for Christ. For example: a missionary may travel to an unsafe and dangerous place because of their love for Christ. Doctors may expose themselves to deadly disease in order to bring healing to the sick. And in a multitude of other ways, we who trust in the Lord will take risks and be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others. Relative to Revelation 6, Paul’s words in Romans 8 take on new meaning, when he says, ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us”*** (Romans 8:35-37). The fifth seal calls for patience, to allow time for all who will receive our Lord Jesus Christ to be saved and have the opportunity to live or sacrifice their lives for Him who sacrificed Himself that they might gain eternal life.

Depending on one’s own personal interpretation one could say that none or all of the signs depicted in the first four seals has already come about. While a particular individual has not been identified as the Antichrist, the spirit of the antichrist is present in the world and we have seen many pretenders come forward claiming to be Christ. Two world wars have killed tens of millions. Famine, both as a result of war and climate

change has spread throughout the world, but amazingly has spared the wealthiest of nations. Christians and Christianity have come under attack, and persecution in many places on the earth seems to be increasing. We see some of this manifesting itself in Islamic fundamentalist who wage a war of terrorism against both Christians and Jews. What is clear is that we have not seen the final sign revealed in the sixth seal. Therefore, if we have entered the Tribulation period we have not reached the end, which means we can expect things to get much worse before the Lord intercedes for the sake of the elect. Let us now examine the final sign before the great and terrible Day of the Lord arrives.

Revelation 6:12-14, states: ***“And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”*** This will truly be a cosmic event that will shake heaven and earth. It is hard to image destruction so massive and wide spread that ***“every island and mountain”*** will be ***“moved out of their places.”*** In Matthew 24:29 Jesus says, ***“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”*** From Jesus’ words in Matthew we know that this sign comes after, or at the end of the Great Tribulation. From Joel 2:31 we learned that it precedes the coming of the ***“great and awesome day of the Lord.”*** Therefore, we can see this sign as a time of transition, and based on what is revealed in verses 15 through 17 which follow, it will also be a sign of recognition. In other words, when this sign is revealed many will recognize their error in denying or rejecting Christ, and that punishment is at hand. God’s judgment is about to be released on the world and the wicked are about to receive their deserved punishment. But even now, mercy accompanies judgment, for punishment will come in a series of escalating events, perhaps leaving room and time for repentance.

Revelation 6:15-17, states: ***“And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne,***

and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'" The greatest and most powerful of the earth now hide in caves and are filled with terror because they know the time has come to face the consequences of their choice to reject Christ. They now realize and are faced with the fact that all that God has revealed through His Word is true. They can no longer deny His name or His truth. There is no place to hide from the One who sees all and has authority over all. They are doomed and now await the execution of their fate. Why do they not repent?

CHAPTER-7:

Chapter 7 provides a brief interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, and mentions two distinct groups that will be saved. The first group are descendents of Israel and the pause in the destruction is to provide opportunity for them to be marked as servants of God. This process of marking before the release of judgment is very similar to that described in Ezekiel 9. The second group is a great multitude that have come out of the Great Tribulation because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. We could perhaps say that they have "marked" themselves with the blood of the Lamb, and by doing so have gained salvation. Many believe those in the second group have sealed themselves through their own blood, meaning they have died during the Great Tribulation for the Lord's sake, died because of their belief in Jesus Christ. Because this second group is designated as having come out of every nation, tribe and tongue, it is generally distinguished as gentiles. Thus, the first group is Jews, marked by God as His servants, and the second group gentiles, who have marked themselves as servants of God through the blood of the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ. We should remember that the blood of lambs was used to mark the doors of the homes of God's people to protect them when God poured out judgment upon the first born of Egypt.

Revelation 7:1-3, states: *"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."* In the breaking of the first six seals we have

seen a rapidly escalating physical and spiritual destruction, but between the sixth and seventh seals we see a pause for the marking and/or revealing of those marked by God for salvation. In Revelation we have four angels at the four corners of the earth holding back destruction. The implication is not that the earth is square with corners but corresponds to the four points of the compass. The destruction will be complete and extend to all of the earth. The fifth angel is ascending (coming up) from the rising of the sun (coming at the beginning of a new day). This angel brings a message to the other four that they are to delay destruction until God's people are marked. The angel uses the plural "we" regarding those who will do the sealing. It is not clear if the four angels are to participate in the sealing or the ascending angel is not alone but has others to help. In any case, what is important is that the "servants of God" will be sealed or marked. The reason they are marked is not given, but it can be presumed that they are being distinguished so that they will be excluded from the wrath of God which will do harm to the "earth, sea and trees."

Further evidence that the seal or mark is to exclude God's servants from harm can be found in Ezekiel 9:1-6, which is as follows: ***"Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, "Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. And the Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary." So they started with the elders who were before the temple."*** In Ezekiel we have six destroyers and a seventh man in linen who marks God's people who ***"sigh and groan over all the abominations."*** Ezekiel's vision teaches us that there will be no escape for the wicked,

not even for women and children. Only those who are marked will be spared. Evidently, the same will be true when God pours out final punishment and judgment on the earth.

Revelation 7:4-8, states: ***“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.”*** Clearly those to be sealed and spared are all Jews, Israelites, the descendents of the sons of Israel. We are told the number is 144,000 comprised of 12,000 from each tribe. This does not mean that only 144,000 will be sealed and saved. The total of 144,000 is derived from the formula of (12 x 12 x 1,000). This formula and number is often seen as “all inclusive” or as “representative” of all who will be saved. God may be saying that He will save all of the devote Jews still alive at the end or the number may only represent the total who will be saved. Because I believe God is always consistent in His teachings, I believe not all Jews will be sealed as in the example found in Ezekiel’s vision and many other examples in Scripture. The description could even be literal in that the 144,000 represent the final remnant that God will save as He has always promised to preserve a “remnant” of His chosen people. We should not however confuse the sealing of the 144,000 with the salvation of the gentiles. Clearly, in Revelation 7 God is making a clear distinction between two different groups who will be saved from God’s wrath and punishment. The Jews are listed first and now we will examine the second group.

Revelation 7:9, states: ***“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.”*** This description makes it clear that this group is not limited to any national, cultural or ethnic group, but is comprised of people from all the earth. We are told that this multitude is so large no one could count them, which

would suggest there will be many times the 144,000 “counted” out of the Israelites. This group wears white robes, which we were told in Revelation 6:11 were given to the martyrs when they were told to wait until the number who would die for Christ was complete. These people are no longer under the throne so perhaps we can surmise the number of martyrs is now complete. They hold palm branches in their hands, which according to Leviticus 23:40 are held and waved with joy on the first Day of Atonement, the celebration of the sacrifice for sins and the reconciliation between God and man. Therefore, all elements of the description point to the multitudes being Christians who have died for Christ. Looking back at Revelation 6:11, the indication is that they have “died” for Christ rather than having been “raptured” (taken up) by Christ. This does not mean that there are no longer any Christians alive on the earth and only Jews to be sealed. If the description of protection in the midst of destruction provided in Psalm 91 is in reference to Jews alone, then it could be true that God has removed Christians from the earth. If the Psalm 91 description pertains to all who find refuge in Christ, Jew and Christian alike, then it is possible that Christians, sealed by the blood of Christ, will also be protected from all the destruction which is about to take place.

Revelation 7:10-12, states: ***“and they cry out with a loud voice, saying “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” 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, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”*** Those who have been saved now cry out salvation to God and to the Lamb. This may seem odd because we see God as the source of our salvation rather than the recipient. This scene is similar to that of Revelation 4:10 when the twenty-four elders cast their crowns before God. God’s grace provided them the crowns, and God does not need their crowns, yet they cast them before God. The act of giving to God what God has given us is an act of worship and acknowledgment that God is the source of the gifts we have received. The multitude, along with the twenty-four elders, the angels and the four living creatures, now praise and honor God. We believe God is worthy of blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might forever. And we add salvation to our list. He is the source of all these things.

Revelation 7:13-14, states: ***“And one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?” And 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.”*** Here we see put to rest any remaining question regarding who the multitude are who stand before the throne in white robes. The question is raised to John, which he cannot answer to indicate he is not the source of this revelation. Then the elder provides the answer, advising that these people come out of the great tribulation and have made their robes white by the blood of Christ. Therefore, most Bible scholars see them as the last of the martyrs whose numbers were not yet complete in Revelation 6:11. They have received salvation through the blood of Christ—by His merits and His perfection and His sacrifice they have become clean and worthy to stand before the throne of God. Many would say they have shared in a baptism of blood, following Christ as the first martyr, being willing to shed their own blood as a testimony of their faith in Christ. Perhaps there will be a distinction for those who die for Christ in that they will be given the honor to serve and worship immediately before the throne of God and Christ. But Scripture teaches us that not only those who die for Christ will join with Him in heaven but also those who live for Christ—are a living sacrifice. Paul urges us to be such in Romans 12:1, saying, ***“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”*** We are each called to die to sin and be reborn through the blood of Christ. Through baptism and profession of our faith in Jesus Christ we are washed clean of our sin by the blood of Christ—our robes are made white. Personally, I must question if truly living our lives for Christ is not the same as giving our lives for Christ. Whether in living or dying, let us each be willing to sacrifice our lives for Christ.

Revelation 7:15, states: ***“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 shall spread His tabernacle over them.”*** This verse provides the basis for those who believe God distinguishes martyrs with the special honor of serving before His throne. The act of ***“spreading His tabernacle over them”*** could be seen as making them priests in His

temple because only priests were allowed to enter the temple. All others had to stand outside in the courtyard of the temple and worship. On the other hand, Revelation 21:22 informs us that in the New Jerusalem there is no temple ***“for the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb, are its temple.”*** Likewise, in 1 Peter 2:9-10 we are told: ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*** Perhaps God’s spreading ***“His tabernacle over them”*** means that God’s extends His house to include those who live and die for Him.

Revelation 7:16-17, states: ***“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”*** These final verses are likely provided as an assurance that persecution will come to an end. During times of persecution, Christians were and are deprived of those things that sustain physical life such as food and drink. They are also forced to suffer the “heat” of persecution. God is promising that someday the Lamb will be their shepherd and lead them to springs of the water of life. Likewise, someday God will wipe every tear from their eyes for they will no longer suffer under persecution or have any reason to cry.

(End of Part-4)