

## Lesson # 26 Tribulation Martyrs

## Revelation 7:9-17

Date: November 28, 2010

<sup>9</sup>After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup>and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" <sup>11</sup>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, <sup>12</sup>saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

<sup>13</sup>Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" <sup>14</sup>I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

<sup>15</sup>"Therefore they are before the throne of God,  
and serve him day and night in his temple;  
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

<sup>16</sup>They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;  
the sun shall not strike them,  
nor any scorching heat.

<sup>17</sup>For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,  
and he will guide them to springs of living water,  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

①

## I. A Great Multitude

## Rev. 7:9

There are some noteworthy contrasts between verses 1-8 and this section. There are a definite # of people being referred to in the first 8 verses – 144,000 – but an innumerable number in v. 9. The first group is from the 12 tribes of Israel ( even if they come from different nations ) but this new group is from every nation, tribe, peoples and languages. The first group is being sealed in preparation for dangerous times about to come while the 2<sup>nd</sup> group is rejoicing in victory & absolute security; because the first group is on earth, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> group is in heaven.

John begins this vision as he often does, with “after this I looked”, so this is definitely a change of scenes, but what is the time frame here? Is John describing an event that occurs later as a result of the evangelistic efforts of the 144,000 just described, maybe at the end of the Tribulation, a sort of tabulating of results? Or is this describing something simultaneous to the first 8 verses,. But a view of what is going on in heaven as the sealing takes place on earth? That this group in heaven is being shown to John, they are obviously already dead, but glorified souls, and v. 14 tells us they have come out of the Tribulation.

Some argue that these are symbolic representatives of the elect from all ages, but the context of the passage and the terms used limit them to a specific group not as broad as “all ages”. Others say that this is a scene looking ahead to the end of the 7 year Tribulation, but this is an unlikely place to put this vision of “the end” when the 7<sup>th</sup> seal has not yet even been opened.

Others say that the white robes must signify that these are all martyrs, and that normal Christians won’t receive such robes until after the great resurrection, but the text does not say that every one of them is a martyr. Some may have died of natural causes, or been killed as a result of the upheavals on earth. The white robes really signify that every Christian has been washed clean by the blood of Christ, not just martyrs. Notice **Matt. 22:1-14**; esp. **vv. 12-14**.

The best way to interpret this crowd is that they are both Jews & Gentile believers who died somehow after the rapture, and during the period of the 6 seals, and they are seen by John in heaven simultaneous to the sealing of the 14,000 on earth. This scene takes place during the Tribulation period therefore – absent from the body, present with the Lord ( II Cor. 5:8 ) – and prior to the Millennial Kingdom. This is a scene of heavenly triumph! Their number is being constantly added to – note v. 14 – “the ones coming out” – a continuous action.

The location is God’s throne room, as the presence of the 4 Living Creatures and the 24 Elders attest, plus all the angels ( v. 11 ) are there as well. This multitude would be standing outside of the closest in proximity to the throne. Their white robes symbolize purity, holiness, victory and having been made righteous in Christ, whom they are worshipping in radiant praise. They carry palm branches in their hands, a further evidence of the victorious nature of this scene. This was the means of ushering the Messiah into Jerusalem during the Triumphal Entry ( cf. JN 12:12-13 ). Think about this scene before us...millions of people gathered around God’s throne lifting up thunderous praise while waving palm branches! Truly an astounding and awe-inspiring picture. ②

The object of their praise & attention is God & the Lamb. Once one arrives here, there are no idolatrous distractions. There is one primary focus, the very *raison d’être* is to worship God and Christ with everything in you, hating any distraction – to have finally reached that point of loving God with heart, soul, mind & strength – true salvation finalized, souls glorified, completed.

## II. The Praise

## v. 10

This crowd’s unified purpose is to cry out praises to God & to the Lamb, and the nature of their praise is to ascribe credit or glory for salvation, something each person in this crowd is very familiar with. Salvation is the theme of almost all the passages of praise found in the book of Revelation.

Salvation is something experienced by only the Elect. There is no salvation for the holy angels ( who apparently don't need it, but are quite interested in it ) or fallen angels ( who are not extended that grace ), or for animals.

That the source of salvation is ascribed to both God & the Lamb is in accordance with all the theology we see in the Bible. In fact, although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned here, the entire Trinity is involved in our salvation: the Father ( God ) is the One who sends the Son to save the Elect & in fact gives the Elect to the Son ( **John 17:6** ) & is the One to whom Christ brings those He saves ( **I Pet. 1:13-21**; 3:18 ). In fact, in this passage in I Peter, note the allusions to the Father's foundational work in our salvation; v. 13 "grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ", and cf. **Heb. 1:1-2**. It is God's wrath that Jesus' sacrifice propitiates – I JN 2:2. Through out the gospel of John, Jesus credits the Father with being the impetus behind all of Christ's actions – cf. **JN 5:16-23,30,43a; 7:28-30; 8:18, 26-29; 10:15-18, 25-30** etc. It is the Father whom we pray to, in Jesus' name, and it is to the Father that earthly worship is to be directed – JN 4:21-24.

The Son's role in salvation is the most familiar to us, as He is the One who has taken on human form, lived a perfect, sinless life, died a substitutionary death in our place, who was resurrected to validate His claims and His mission's success, and then ascended to take His rightful place at the right hand of the Father on His heavenly throne, where we see Him here. The entire OT looked forward to His arrival and ministry, the gospels narrate His life, and the rest of the NT interprets His ministry for us. He is the central figure in the Bible and of history ③ itself.

The role of the Holy Spirit tends to be more mysterious and controversial to us, mostly because the passages which deal with the work of the Holy Spirit are interspersed throughout the Bible, and the context of these passages direct us to poll all the facts together to come up with exactly how the Holy Spirit contributes to our salvation – and He is indispensable in it. Here are just a few verses to hang our thoughts on:

- JN 15:26 – bears witness of Jesus Christ
- JN 16:8 – convicts the world of sin, righteousness & judgment
- JN 16:13 – guides believers into truth – prophecy
- JN 16:14 – will glorify Christ
- Rom. 8:11 – dwells in believers, keeps us from sin
- Rom. 8:16 – bears witness of our having been saved
- Rom. 8: 26-27 – helps us to pray
- I Cor. 12 / Gal. 5: 22 – gives us spiritual gifts
- Eph. 1:13-14 – seals us / guarantees our inheritance
- II Thess. 2:7-8 – restrains evil

Our salvation was planned before the foundation of the world by the Trinity / Godhead – cf. Eph. 1:11 and is carried out throughout history, which provides a context and timeline along with contemporaneous events which become the

means God uses to bring the gospel message to His elect in a saving way. Note **Acts 17:24-27**.

This praise by this vast multitude of saints in v. 10 refers to salvation as a completed and fully successful operation. This salvation they refer to is not theoretical or in flux, but is the reality for these people who have arrived safe in glory, never again to experience sin, sorrow or death. The only thing missing is the redemption of their bodies, which will occur at the final resurrection – cf. **Rom. 8:23**. This scene is a depiction, for these people, of Rom. 8:29-30 – the final link in the golden chain of redemption & they cannot stop praising God for it. This is joy unimaginable to those of us still fighting our own sin.

### III. Heaven-wide Worship

vv. 11-14a

The angels, the 4 Living Creatures & the 24 Elders are in this multitude as well, and their response to this wall of praise is to fall on their faces and worship God before His throne. It is not stated, but it is likely they are nearer the throne than this vast throng of people. As mighty as these beings are, it is to God alone whom they direct their unlimited adoration and worship.

We are told the message that their worship is conveying in v. 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 first amen is an echo of agreement with the worship of the multitude ( v. 10 ), followed by their own doxology – 7 fold – ascribing blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power & might to God... forever & ever. ④

God has delivered these redeemed millions ( billions? ) from the most formidable array of evil ever unleashed on earth. They have been delivered, not ( in this case ) alive physically, but spiritually alive though physically dead. They stand here before His throne as ample proof that Christ has overcome sin, death & Hell. They stand now on the verge of the Millennial Kingdom & the eternal state – redeemed & safe from any harm at the hands of Satan, his minions or evil men & women. They are home!

In v. 13, an interview between John and one of the 24 elders now serves to help us identify who this multitude of people is. The odd aspect of this conversation is that it is the elder who asks John, “Who are these and where did they come from?”. He is anticipating the question John was about to ask, and it does need to be clear who these people are or the point of the vision ( to reveal something ) may be lost in the overall spectacular nature of what is being seen.

Since somewhere on earth, someone is always dying, in this scene, a stream of new worshippers is constantly being added to their number. The current death rate is about 167 people per hour dying – and obviously not all these are heaven bound. In the Tribulation period – it will likely be faster at some points in time. John’s reply is one of humility – “Sir, you know”. IOW, John would not presume to tell this elder what he thought about the scene.

Consider John’s background and his time with Christ on earth. He is likely overwhelmed by the size of this crowd. He may have expected only a few to be saved – cf. Matt. 7:13,14; 22:14 – and they variety of nationalities involved undoubtedly exceeded his expectations as

well. So he defers to the elder to await the facts. The elder's reply to John takes up the rest of chapter 7, from vv. 15-17.

## IV. Jesus' Blood & Righteousness v. 14b

John is told that this multitude are “the ones coming out of the great Tribulation” – continuous action. This supports that Paul was correct, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. If they are coming out of the Great Tribulation, and it is still ongoing, then there is no delay – you die and instantly go to heaven, even though the redemption of the body comes later on – Rev. 20:4.

This is the specific final Tribulation in view here – not just a historical view of all past ages when people have died and gone to heaven, but this is a specific group at a specific time – the last 3 ½ years of the final 7, the last ½ of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week.

During this final 3 ½ years, as God's wrath bombards the earth and its inhabitants, His elect will not come under His wrath, but they will face the worst persecution and deadliest hatred ever directed at God's people throughout history. The anti-God world will seek out those visible representatives of God and snuff out their lives as quickly and yet unmercifully as they can. It is with this time in mind that Jesus tells us that:

[Mat 24:22](#) And except those **days** should be **shortened**, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those **days** shall be **shortened**. KJV

⑤

Remember that even before the Tribulation began ( II Thess. 2:7-8 ), the restraints against evil were removed so that those alive during this time will face a world in which God is allowing man's sinful nature “free” but controlled rein to do as they please, and it pleases the natural man to sin as much as he cares to.

Martyrdom on a scale never experienced in history will be the order of the day during the Tribulation and mostly, the victims will be those who have come to Christ against all odds and who, as a result, will buck the worldwide system the Antichrist is counting on for world domination.

It is not their own blood being shed which accounts for the presence of these souls in heaven. We might think so, just as Muslims believe that martyrs for their cause will result in heaven and great reward. We must realize however, although martyrdom for Christ is pretty good evidence of real salvation, it does not cause salvation. It is faith in the shed blood of Christ that washes away sins and makes sinners righteous. He is the One who has paid redemption's price, not the sinner, even one who dies as a martyr.

The whiteness of their robes is said to be the result of their having been “washed in the blood of the Lamb”. This reminds me of [Isaiah 1:18](#). Since sin = death

( Rom. 6:23 ), and death often is a result of bloodshed, red is the symbolic colour for sin, while white symbolizes holiness, purity and righteousness. Washing in Christ's blood ( obviously in a spiritual sense ) makes one's soul white because sin ( red ) has been eradicated in that person's life. So here they stand, not on their own merit, not as if they have earned white robes, but because Christ sought them and bought them! They could otherwise not stand before God's throne and live.

## V. The Glorious State of the Redeemed vv. 15-17

It is difficult to do justice to a passage like the 3 verses before us now. These verses reveal a glorious truth and a depth of promise that can scarcely be fathomed. What does it mean to "serve God day & night in this temple"? We use the phrase "serving God" a lot, as a sort of catch phrase for Christians, and when we do, if challenged, we can even put labels on it – worshipping, preaching, teaching, helping others, evangelizing, praying, obeying, etc. But what does it mean in the context of heaven where most of these avenues of service are no longer necessary? ( ie. evangelism )

It is not as if God needs our service – cf. **Ps. 50:12; Acts 17:25; LK 3:8; 19:40** – so why is this such a big deal in our text? This appears to be perpetual as well – "day & night", ceaseless, ongoing, and it takes place in God's temple. If we ponder this from a man centered perspective, we might be inclined to think that this sounds like a boring eternal existence, akin to perpetual harp playing – doing service ( who knows what service ) for God all the time. However, from a God centered perspective, we will begin to recognize that God, in His grace and mercy is providing us with the ultimate in potential joy as we magnify & glorify Him who is the most worthy of all praise and adoration. You can trust that whatever serving God in heaven will mean, it will provide us with more unceasing joy than we could ever imagine. ⑥

While there is a temple in heaven during this vision of John's prior to Christ's return to earth, and there will be a temple on earth during the Millennial Kingdom ( Ezek. 40-48 ), there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem – cf. **Rev. 21:22**, but note the parallelism in **Rev. 21:1-4 & Rev. 7:15b-17**.

In vv. 16-17, the very things these people suffered on earth – hunger, thirst, scorching heat – cannot touch them here before God's throne. The Lamb, their shepherd has brought them to those still, clear, deep & cool waters of life. The comfort we just read about in 21:4 & and notice **21:27**, no persecutor will ever touch them & no evil will ever again overtake them. They are home.