

## Revelation (2020) – 7

7-1

- The Tribulation, otherwise known as the day of the Lord, is underway
  - Last week we learned that this period of history is fast approaching because all the signs Jesus gave us have begun
    - We also know that the Lord has promised to return for us before this time begins
    - So we're studying it for the purpose of understanding what's coming for the world
    - And in that understanding, we're in a position to explain it to others, both to the church and to the world
  - Daniel told us that this seven-year period will begin when a man makes a covenant with Israel to permit Israel to sacrifice in a temple
    - That moment isn't recorded in Revelation, but we do see the events surrounding that moment
    - Specifically, we saw the rise of that man on the world stage, a mysterious world leader who comes with threats of war
    - And his arrival is depicted through the first series of judgments in Revelation 6
  - Jesus opened the first two of the seal judgments which focus on the Antichrist
    - The first seal corresponded to the Antichrist's rise to power
    - As Jesus opens a seal in Heaven, He is giving permission for the man of lawlessness to ascend to the position he desires
  - That man was pictured on a white horse, with a bow and a wreath or crown
    - As we learned last week, these features represented a military leader who threatens military attack though he hasn't the power as yet
    - Perhaps he launches a coup or raises a rebellion or by some other means he forces his way into a position of power

- Then the second seal Jesus opens moves the Antichrist a step further down his path of world conquest
  - The second seal pictured the Antichrist riding a red horse with a sword
    - This seal resulted in a world war around from the Antichrist's disrupting influence on world politics
    - The war results in widespread bloodshed as represented by the red horse and the sword
    - So the man who came to conquer has now initiated the conquering, at great expense to the world
  - These judgments may not sound especially devastating but think back to the worldwide devastation that World War II produced
    - And then remember that these wars are like birth pains, so that they get worse with each new war
    - So this war will be worse than WWII, perhaps because nuclear weapons will be involved
    - Imagine the bloodshed inflicted by world nuclear war
  - And that leads us into the next seal judgment

7-2

**Rev. 6:5** When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

**Rev. 6:6** And I heard something like 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 damage the oil and the wine."

- Jesus continues opening the edge of the scale and another seal separates, leading to a new phase of calamity on the earth below
  - Once more John is instructed to look down upon the earth to see what transpires
    - And as he looks, he sees a black horse with a rider holding scales in his hand
    - And again, the rider is unnamed and referenced only by the pronoun "he"

- As we learned in the earlier two horses, the continuing use of a pronoun means that the character hasn't changed
- We're still looking at the same person in each case, the same "he," the Antichrist
- So we're still looking at the impact of the Antichrist's rise upon the world as Jesus propels him up the ladder of power
- This time his horse is black, and like the red and white horses, the color could symbolize many things
  - So we must consider its meaning in context, based on what's said about this horse and the prior horses
  - Beginning with what this man on the black horse is holding: scales
- Scales are common in our modern culture, and when used as symbols, they usually refer to justice – as in the scales of justice
  - But the context here isn't of justice or fairness
  - So we need to look to a more ancient meaning for this symbol
- In ancient times the monetary system was based on bartering goods whose value was established by weight
  - So it was necessary to measure an exact amount in each transaction
    - And a scale would be used to establish and compare the value of an item for sale or a method of payment to a known value
    - So an object of a known weight would be placed on one side of the scale and another object placed on the opposite side
    - When the scale is balanced, then the two sides are equal in weight and therefore equal in value
  - Secondly, when coin money was used, the coins were weighed to verify that they contained the specified amount of precious metal
    - Without this check, people would shave small amounts of the metal off their coins to accumulate the metal for themselves
    - Over time, the coins lost significant weight thus cheating merchants and the shaved material could be spent again

- So a reference to the Antichrist holding the scales points our attention to the economic impact of this man on the world
  - And in the context it clearly symbolizes him impacting retail commerce
  - And it's easy at this point to see a pattern emerging
- The threat of a military leader (white horse) becomes the trigger to start a war leading to bloodshed (a red horse)
  - And then following a great war bringing widespread death and destruction, we have the normal, expected consequences
  - The onset of war always has devastating effects on the economy of the world
  - And the worse the war, the worse the impact
- So the effect of WWII will be severe scarcity of goods and then naturally as supply decreases, prices increase
  - We see the price increase reflected clearly in v.6 as the world endures unprecedented inflation
    - John is told that a quart of wheat and three quarts of barley will each cost a denarius
    - A denarius was the backbone of the Roman currency system
    - The denarius was first introduced in 211 BC and contained 4.5 grams of silver
  - A day laborer in first century Rome typically earned one denarius per day before taxes
    - In John's day, a denarius bought around 12 quarts of wheat and 36 quarts of barley
    - A quart of wheat produces about 1.5 loaves of bread, or enough food to feed a family for a day
    - So a poor family could subsist for almost 2 weeks on a denarius worth of wheat or even longer if they bought barley
  - By comparison, a laborer working at minimum wage today earns about \$80 per day before taxes

7-3

7-4

- A day's wage today if spent frugally can support a family with subsistence food for several days...maybe a week or more
- But under the antichrist, the world experiences runaway inflation for even basic goods
- As a result of the Antichrist's war, a denarius only buys 1.5 loaves of bread
- That would mean a loaf of bread will cost about \$60 in today's money
- And if bread costs \$60, how expensive will items like meat or cheese be?
- So we need to ask, what will be the impact of such hyperinflation?
  - The answer is obvious...panic, rampant crime, looting, and ultimately starvation for many
    - The Antichrist will produce these effects indirectly simply through the prosecution of war around the globe
    - War naturally brings pressure on the food supply, since it disrupts food production and distribution
  - Also, armies consume large amounts of supplies, leaving precious little for the civilian populace
    - So the black horse symbolizes the death of many from war-induced hyper-inflation and the resulting global starvation
    - But as before, we trace this event to the opening of a seal, as the Lord permits these judgments to come upon the world
  - Interestingly, two products are specifically excluded from the high prices: wine and oil
    - It's not clear why these are excluded and many have speculated for why that is
    - One answer I prefer is that these are chief crops in Israel, and they come from olives and grapes which represent Israel
  - Therefore, it may indicate that the land of Israel is spared to some extent from the warfare

- That makes sense since the Antichrist's rise to power comes from an agreement with Israel
- So for now it seems that agreement is protecting Israel from the war ravaging the world

7-5

**Rev. 6:7** When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come."

**Rev. 6:8** I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. 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 fourth seal brings one more horse with a rider, so we know we're still looking at the step-by-step impact of the Antichrist's arrival
  - But this horse changes the pattern slightly because now the rider has a name: Death and following him is Hades
    - We're still looking at a horse with a rider and a series, so there is still a connection implied with the first three seals
    - But the naming of the rider and the addition of a follower adds some new mystery
  - The addition of Hades has led some to conclude that there are really five horses here, but that interpretation misses the larger picture
    - First, remember the pattern that was established with the first three seals
    - Each horse with a rider represented something that the Antichrist accomplished on earth
    - The nature of the horse and other symbols reflects his impact and each subsequent horse builds on the prior horse
  - The rider of the fourth horse is death and Hades follows
    - Obviously, death and Hades aren't real people...death is a condition and Hades is a place
    - So the logical interpretation of the final horse is that we're seeing the final and ultimate effect of the Antichrist's rise to power
    - He will bring widespread death upon the earth

- And the effect of death for an unsaved, unbelieving earth is entry into Hell or Hades
- And that conclusion is supported by the horse's color and by what we're told in v.8
  - First, the horse's color is described as ashen in our English version
    - In Greek the word for ashen is *chloros*, which is most literally translated green (from where we get the word chlorophyll)
    - The suggestion is of the color of a body many hours after death which could be described as pale green
    - This is not the natural color of any horse, so this color confirms for us that these horses are symbolic
    - So the ashen horse represents the stench and rot of many dead bodies left unburied
  - Secondly, in v.8 we're told that the overall toll of the war, famine, and pestilence resulting from the war leaves a fourth of humanity dead
    - By today's population count, we're talking about nearly 2 billion people dying in a world war
    - By comparison, the highest estimate of the dead in WWI was 22 million and the dead in WWII was 56 million
    - Clearly, the next war will result in an unimaginable devastation just as Jesus' birth pangs suggest
  - These deaths are the result of the culmination of the first four seal judgements as explained in v.8
    - Sword (meaning war, which was the first and second seals)
    - Famine (the result of war, which was the third seal)
    - Pestilence (the diseases that ordinarily follow famine and war, which is the fourth seal)
    - And even wild beasts, who for lack of food become more aggressive, which is also the fourth seal
- Looking back on the first four judgments, they are obviously connected together almost as a group

- All are brought in a similar fashion: on symbolic horses and each judgment builds naturally upon the prior
  - From the perspective of those living on earth during this period, the events will appear to be entirely natural in their origins
  - There is no indication that the world appreciates that God is bringing these judgments as part of the final seven of Daniel 9
  - We understand they are the result of the Lord's judgments, as He opens each scroll and so will the world soon
- Even the number of horses (4) tells us something about God's purposes
  - The number 4 is the number of the Earth in Scripture
  - So the first four judgments are designed to look like earthly events, not heavenly judgment
  - And though the world doesn't know it, these devastating events are simply the warm up act for the rest of Tribulation

7-7

**[Rev. 6:9](#)** When the Lamb 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;

**[Rev. 6:10](#)** and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

**[Rev. 6:11](#)** 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, would be completed also.

- The fifth seal breaks the earlier pattern of horses entirely, and in fact this seal also breaks the pattern of John being told to come look upon the earth
  - Instead, his attention remains on the scene in Heaven
    - John describes the altar, meaning it is a place of significance in the temple
    - An altar is a place of sacrifice, so the presence of an altar in heaven tells us this is the place of sacrifice
    - And in Heaven the only place of sacrifice is the Heavenly tabernacle

- Hebrews 9 tells us that Christ is the High Priest presiding over this heavenly tabernacle and His blood was the sacrifice
- Under this altar John sees the souls of martyrs, meaning these are the disembodied spirits
  - We know these cannot be church saints, since all church saints will have physical bodies after the Rapture
  - So these are human beings who died after the resurrection of the church, which means they died in the Tribulation itself
- Secondly, they were killed because of the word of God and because they maintained their testimony
  - They are martyred for their faith, so clearly these are believers
  - But we know that all believers were removed from the earth when Jesus came for the Church at the resurrection
  - So that produces a new mystery
- Finally, these souls are asking for justice for their death, so they are obvious victims of an injustice on the earth
  - Yet they are told that there will be more killed just as they were and until that number is complete, they must wait for justice
  - So that means these are merely the first to be martyred and many more are going to experience the same before the end
- Taken these facts together, we can make several conclusions concerning these souls
  - First, these souls were believers on the earth, otherwise they wouldn't be in Heaven following death
    - That means that new faith has arrived on earth in the days and weeks following the Church's removal
    - That leaves us wondering how faith came back to the earth, especially since there are no believers to evangelize
  - Secondly, believers on earth during the Tribulation will be targets for persecution – even to death
    - They will be killed for their testimony, which must mean that a willingness to identify as a Christian is dangerous

- Furthermore, these are merely the first of a larger number who must be killed for the same reason
- What do we call these martyred saints that came to faith and died following the removal of the church from the earth?
  - Most call them Tribulation saints and as we will see during the course of our study, these saints endure hell on earth
  - So never has it been more true that death is a blessing for a believer than it is for these believers
- And so we must understand that this seal is not a moment during the seven years but rather a summary of the seven years
  - In other words, when Jesus breaks this seal, He opens the door for His followers to be persecuted
  - Just as Daniel told us:

7-8

**[Dan. 7:24](#)** 'As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.

**[Dan. 7:25](#)** 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

**[Dan. 7:26](#)** 'But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.

**[Dan. 7:27](#)** 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

- The persecution of saints isn't limited to a moment or a certain group, but as the text says there will be more coming
  - In fact, according to Daniel the martyrdom of the saints will be concentrated in the second half of Tribulation
  - So this seal judgment represents the death of believers in the Tribulation over all
- This seal provides a contrast to the fourth seal judgment

7-9

- In the fourth judgment, death came to the unbelieving world
  - We know it was speaking only of death for the unbeliever since the destination for those souls was Hades
  - The indirect cause for their death was the Antichrist's leadership and the resulting chaos
  - But the true cause of their death was Jesus opening a seal to allow for that event to take place
- And now by contrast, the fifth judgment shows death coming to the saints
  - Unlike those who go to Hades, these dead find themselves under the altar in the throne room of God crying out for vengeance
  - These two seal judgments are set against one another to make clear that both unbeliever and believer are dying in Tribulation
- The circumstances of each group's death are very different just as the destinations for the souls are very different
  - But both the direct and indirect causes of the deaths are the same
  - The direct cause of both is Jesus opening seals which bring about the events on earth
- And the indirect cause is the working of the Antichrist on earth
  - His ambition and aggression brings the war that kills billions of unbelievers
  - And his persecution of the saints, as Daniel told us, brings about the death of the believers
- So where do these saints come from if all believers were raptured prior to Tribulation?
  - We find that answer in the next chapter but first we need to move to the sixth seal

7-10

**Rev. 6:12** 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;

[Rev. 6:13](#) and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.

[Rev. 6:14](#) The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

- Now for the first time we see a seal judgment resulting in clearly supernatural changes on earth
- And increasingly, the judgments that God brings to earth will take supernatural form
- There will be a series of unimaginable cataclysmic upheavals of nature, the physical earth and the heavens
- Like the OT prophets said, these events will be unlike anything that has come before
- But it's important to realize that in the very beginning stages of the Tribulation, the world will not see supernatural events
  - The natural events that God brings will be bad enough
  - But as the supernatural evidence piles up, the world will soon recognize that these events are coming from a God in Heaven
  - But that recognition will not have the result you might have expected

7-11

- The sixth seal brings earthquakes, devastation to the face of the earth, deadly objects following from the sky, and disturbances to the sun, moon and stars
  - The judgments of Tribulation come in three waves and at the end of each wave, we see this same climactic series of events
    - Some of these events resemble things that happen today, like earthquakes and winds
    - But of course, nothing we've ever seen will come close to the destruction the world will know during Tribulation
    - The magnitude of the devastation is simply unprecedented and frankly, impossible to imagine
  - So each series of judgments concludes with an awesome and terrifying display of God's earth shaking power, literally

- In this case, the sixth seal judgment causes pronounced supernatural devastation
- Besides a great earthquake, the sun, moon and stars see dramatic supernatural changes
  - First, the sun becomes black
    - This can't be a simple eclipse, for an eclipse would be expected and unthreatening and therefore not a judgment
    - It must be some other unexplained darkening of the sun which then produces meaningful devastation on the earth
  - Next the moon becomes blood red
    - The moon reflects light from the sun
    - So for the moon to reflect any color at all while the sun is giving no light of its own is miraculous
    - So the redness of the moon is a warning to the earth that something dramatic and supernatural is happening
- Next, we're told that the stars fall to the earth, but immediately, we have to rule out a super-literal interpretation
  - A star in the universe is actually a sun, and therefore due to size, a star cannot literally land on the earth (much less many stars)
    - On the other hand, the context won't permit us to interpret this use of star purely symbolically as we did in Chapter 1 for angels
    - The context here is of the sun, moon and stars (i.e., heavenly bodies) so we must stay in that context
  - That leads us to conclude that the word star is being used in the laymen's sense rather than in the scientific sense of a distant sun
    - From the perspective of someone standing on earth, it appears as if stars are falling to earth
    - Meaning these stars will be meteor showers striking the earth with devastating effects
  - Then John describes the sky splitting and rolling up like a scroll
    - And mountains and islands moving

- And these things just boggle our minds
- A movement of islands and mountains even a short distance would utterly obliterate anything on it or near it
  - The tremendous forces of such a movement would be like a child trying to push a sand castle tower a few inches out of place
  - The act of moving that sand castle even slightly would cause it to crumble and disintegrate
  - Likewise, the movement of these large bodies of land would leave anything on their surface as piles of rubble
- Some scientists have tried to understand what would happen if the sun suddenly stopped shining, and the effects match what we see here
  - The earth's temperature would plunge in a matter of days to 100° below zero in a few weeks
    - And plunging temperatures at the earth's surface would lead to hurricane force winds around the planet
    - And the atmosphere would undergo unpredictable and violent changes as temperature variations swing wildly
    - And sudden cooling of the earth's surface could draw heat from inside the earth's core to the earth's surface
    - That could produce severe earthquakes strong enough to move continental plates and release magma
  - Meanwhile, to escape the severe cold, mankind would be forced underground to find heat just as John reported
    - But the earthquakes would make that journey perilous
    - Notice in vs.15-16 everyone is underground: rich to poor, free to slave
    - Because without the sun, even the homes of the very rich can't handle the cold or earthquakes
    - And so they begin wishing for the fall of the rocks on their heads to put themselves out of their misery
- In response to these events, humanity finally begins to understand what's happening

- Where before the earlier judgments were interpreted as everyday human events, these judgments leave no doubt of their origins
  - In vs.16-17 the people say that they are experiencing the wrath of God and the Lamb
  - And the great day of wrath has come
- While it wouldn't take a genius to conclude that these things were the result of an unhappy god, it still begs a question
  - How did they come to understand it as the result of God and His Son, the Lamb?
  - That's a very specific understanding, and it would suggest that someone explained it to them – someone who knows Jesus
- So who is explaining these events to the world and who is explaining about Jesus especially since the Church has been removed in whole?
  - Now John takes a pause from describing the devastation of the judgments on the earth to answer that question

7-12

**Rev. 7:1** 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 would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

**Rev. 7:2** 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,

**Rev. 7:3** 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."

- John begins the seventh chapter saying then I saw, meaning this is the next thing he saw
  - That does not necessary imply that the things he's seeing here happen after the things of Chapter 6
    - And in fact, this is a concept we need to understand for the whole book of Revelation
    - The events of Tribulation are exceedingly complex and in many cases, multiple things happen at the same time

- So in describing the period of Tribulation, John has no choice but to explain them one at a time
  - Nevertheless, in many cases the events happen simultaneously
  - The way we come to know that is by paying careful attention to the way events relate to one another
  - And in some cases, John will give us specific time references in the text to show us how events relate to one another
- In this case, the context will show us that John is describing something that happens at the same time as the events of Chapter 6
  - Beginning with four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, which is euphemism meaning over the entire earth
  - These angels are said to be holding back the four winds of the Earth, which means they prevent wind from blowing anywhere
  - And also notice in v.2 a mention of the rising of the sun
  - And again in v.3 we're told that nothing on the face of the earth may be harmed until at least for a time
- But just a moment ago, we heard the opposite, that winds were blowing, the sun was dark and the face of the earth was devastated
  - So clearly, the events of Chapter 7 predate the events of Chapter 6
  - Therefore, we come to see that this chapter is describing events that start at the beginning of the Tribulation
- Specifically, at the beginning of Tribulation the Lord puts forth an order that the wind will stop blowing on all the earth
  - Now we understand that there was a supernatural judgment happening even before the fifth seal was opened
  - That judgment must have coincided with the signing of the covenant, and it would have produced its own devastation
- Stopping all winds on earth would be devastating to life because the earth's weather and water cycle are driven by wind
  - Wind carries moisture off the oceans to the mountains

7-13

- Moist air condenses over high altitudes as rain and snow, which fills streams and lakes and waters crops
- Without wind, the world would experience devastating drought, famine and starvation
- This detail reminds us of the earlier seal judgments, particularly the ones that brought an interruption in normal food production
  - These angels were likely involved in worsening the calamities of the earlier seal judgments, including in bringing famine
- Then in v.2 we hear of a fifth angel ascending from the rising sun having the seal of the living God
  - We don't know who this angel might be, though he is obviously significant and has authority
    - And this fifth angel is giving instruction to the other four
    - And this begins a new pattern in the book of Revelation: the importance of angels in carrying out the judgments
  - We remember that the letter itself was delivered to John by angels and in the course of the vision, angels will escort or explain things to John
    - But they are also instruments to carry out the judgements themselves
    - So it appears that when Jesus opens a seal, for example, it leads to an angel doing something to effect that judgment on earth
  - However, in this chapter we learn that it's important to God that the devastation be carefully timed to prevent interrupting a sealing
    - Specifically, in v.3 the four angels are told they cannot begin their devastating attacks on the earth until bondservants are sealed
    - A bondservant is the New Testament title for a believer in Jesus Christ
    - So now we learn how new faith returns to the earth following the removal of the church prior to the Tribulation
  - These believers are to be sealed on their foreheads, we're told
    - Now, to be sealed is generally a way of saying being born again

- As Paul says

[2Cor. 1:21](#) Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,  
[2Cor. 1:22](#) who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

- So we should conclude that this passage is describing God preparing to bring a group of people to faith
  - But why the mention of their foreheads? I believe this is related to something that happens later in the book of Revelation
    - Later during these seven years it becomes mandatory for every human being to receive a distinguishing mark on their forehead
    - That mark means a person worships the Antichrist, and those who refuse the mark are killed
    - We will cover this more later, but I believe the mention of sealing the forehead here is to contrast what is coming later
- So to recap, at the beginning of Tribulation, the Lord stops all wind which begins to create significant difficulties on earth
  - Meanwhile, the Antichrist is rising to power leading to world war and more devastation
    - But as all this is happening, the Lord is at work bringing to faith a new generation of believers on earth
    - And then John tells us where this new generation will come from

7-14

[Rev. 7:4](#) 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:

[Rev. 7:5](#) from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,

[Rev. 7:6](#) from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,

[Rev. 7:7](#) from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,

[Rev. 7:8](#) from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

- Here we have the infamous 144,000 of Tribulation you may have heard much about
  - There has been so much speculation about this group of people, and most of it is utter nonsense because it's not bound by the text
    - For example, you may have heard the Jehovah's Witnesses or other non-Christian groups claiming they are the 144,000
    - Some argue over the nationality or origin of these people or the timing of their appearing
  - But all the speculation is so unnecessary because the text itself answers all those questions clearly
    - First, this is a group of bond-servants who come to faith after the start of Tribulation
    - Which confirms that the Holy Spirit will be back on earth at work producing faith during this time
    - Or simply put, the Rapture is not the last chance for people to believe in Christ, though it's much better to believe before than after
  - As Jesus said in John 3, the Spirit's presence is evidenced by His effect in the world
    - Just as when we detect the presence of the wind by watching its effect on leaves, we see the Spirit's work here
    - So if people are being brought to faith and sealed, then we know the Spirit is at work...these people are the product of that work
  - Secondly, we know that no believer on earth today can be part of this group because all believers are removed prior to Tribulation
    - Also, these believers are taken from among twelve tribes of Israel we're told, so they are all Jewish
    - Anyone who is not descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob cannot be one of the 144,000
    - So anyone who places this group outside the time of Tribulation or says they are part of the church hasn't read the Bible properly
- Turning to the group, we are told they are taken in equal numbers from twelve tribes of Israel

- This is an interesting detail since today only one tribe of Jews can still be identified: Levi
  - All other tribe identities have been lost for the most part
  - But God still knows and He will distribute His grace evenly among these tribes
- Some have wondered why the tribe of Dan is missing from the list of twelve tribes
  - First, it is normal in Scripture for writers to maintain the symmetry of twelve tribes
  - But in reality there were thirteen tribes, since Joseph's family line was split into two sons adopted by Israel
- Therefore, whenever the "12" tribes of Israel are mentioned in Scripture, one tribe must be missing to maintain symmetry
  - And generally, the missing tribe is sending a message
  - Here it is Dan that is missing, and the best guess is that Dan's history of having introduced idolatry into Israel has marked them
  - Since they were the first to introduce false worship to Israel, they will not participate in introducing true worship during this time
  - That doesn't mean that no one from the tribe of Dan will be saved, only that they won't be counted in the initial 144,000
- Later in Revelation we find a second chapter (14) devoted to these men
  - In that chapter we learn a few more things about them and their work
  - Specifically, we learn they are all men and will be virgins
- Why does the Lord start with Jews and with such an interesting number (12x12)?
  - First, salvation must always start with the Jewish people in every age, because that's the plan of God for the earth
    - As Jesus Himself said to the women at the well in John 4, salvation is of the Jews
    - God always brings salvation through the Jewish people first

- The patriarchs were Jewish, the prophets were Jewish, the Apostles were Jewish, and of course the Lord was Jewish
- The covenants were given to the Jews, the word of God came through Jewish writers and the temple service belongs to Israel
- So everything we have regarding our salvation and relationship with Christ was made available to us through the Jewish people
  - Just as the Lord promised Abraham, that through his seed many nations would be blessed
  - And that pattern continues in the Tribulation
- Secondly, what does the number 12 mean?
  - God governing through human leaders
  - So these men represent the new house of God on earth
  - They are leading in the new worldwide evangelistic effort
- But more than that, what do we understand about the number 144,000 in the context of coming to faith?
  - Remember, these are literal numbers, not metaphor, so exactly 144,000 came to faith
  - And remember there were no believers on earth prior to them
- So the unavoidable conclusion is that the Lord brought faith to these men, converting them all without human intervention
  - And He did it according to His choice so that exactly 144,00 men came to faith
  - And not just any men, but a specific set of men God appointed from certain tribes
  - The perfect number and circumstances testifies that God is the Author of our faith – both then and now
- So God brings these Jews to faith in Jesus and then calls them to be the first evangelists of Tribulation
  - And from this seed group, the world will experience a new wave of faith

7-15

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

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

**Rev. 7:11** And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

**Rev. 7:12** saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

- John connects this passage to the earlier passage with the important connecting phrase “After these things...”
  - That phrase in Revelation suggests a cause-and-effect relationship
    - We last saw it at the start of Chapter 4, when it announced the end of the letters to the church and the arrival of the church in Heaven
    - So here again, it’s being used to connect the events of the first half of Chapter 7 to what follows
  - And the arrival of 144,000 evangelists on earth leads to a worldwide result
    - An uncountable crowd is seen standing before the Throne and the Lamb
    - If they are in Heaven, then we must conclude they are believers in the Lamb who have died
    - The palm branches they hold and the white robes they wear tell us that they are believers
  - They come from every nation and tribe, which instantly means they are a different group than the 144,000 themselves
    - This is a multinational group of believers which is just what Jesus predicts elsewhere when talking about the time of the end

7-16

**Matt. 24:9** “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

[Matt. 24:10](#) “At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

[Matt. 24:11](#) “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.

[Matt. 24:12](#) “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.

[Matt. 24:13](#) “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

[Matt. 24:14](#) “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

- Jesus said that even as terrible things will begin to happen on earth, nevertheless the gospel will also go out
- And it will go to all the nations and then the end will come
- Jesus was talking about the events of Chapter 7
- John’s connecting phrase in v.9 is the critical clue to tell us that this multitude was created by the actions of the earlier 144,000 Jews
  - In other words, the Lord brought 144,000 Jewish men to faith so that they would then serve Him in proclaiming the Gospel
  - And as they went out obediently, they in turn produced a huge crop of new believers from all over the world
- But now this multitude joins in the worship of the Lamb at the Throne, just as the resurrected saints did in Chapters 4 & 5
  - They are singing praise to the Father and worshipping the Lord
    - Obviously, they are not unhappy to escape the trials of Tribulation below
    - But this is true for all believers when we pass away...we enter into an existence that is far better than the one we leave behind
    - And that’s true whether we are persecuted here or not
  - But the fact that they are in Heaven with John tells us two very important things
    - And in fact it’s so important that we understand these things, that the angel asks John if he’s getting it

[Rev. 7:13](#) Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?”

[Rev. 7:14](#) I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

[Rev. 7:15](#) “For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.

[Rev. 7:16](#) “They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;

[Rev. 7:17](#) for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

- When asked if he knows, John sidesteps the question probably because he’s afraid to say the wrong thing
  - So he lets the angel explain it to him
  - And the answer confirms what we saw coming: these are those who have come to faith during the great tribulation
  - They no longer suffer at the hands of the Antichrist and they are being confronted by their Lord
- But in this details we learn two important things
  - First, it confirms that belief during the time of tribulation is deadly
  - Very very few believers will live to the end of Tribulation
  - The vast majority of those who come to faith in Jesus during the time of Tribulation will be martyred
  - And this is the far better outcome...it is better to die during Tribulation than to live to the end
- Secondly, this scene confirms that we’re looking at events that run concurrently with the judgments of Chapter 6 and with future judgments
  - This is not a single moment during the seven years
    - This chapter tells the story of evangelism during the entire Tribulation
    - There will be evangelism for a time and there will be martyrdom for a time

- Finally, let's take a step back and understand where we go next time, because there is still a seventh seal judgment waiting

7-19

- But that seal doesn't work the way the prior six worked
- The three waves of judgments that take place in Tribulation are called the seals, the trumpets and the bowls
- Each has seven parts

- But these three waves or series are connected together in a unique way
  - They are "nested" like Russian nesting dolls in that the seventh judgment of a given series is the entire next series

7-20

- So the seventh seal judgment is the seven trumpet judgments
- And the seventh trumpet judgment is the seven bowl judgments
- So we haven't seen the seventh seal judgment as yet because when we do, we're actually seeing the start of the trumpet judgments
  - That's what we begin next time in Chapter 8