

1. **Introduction:** Chapter 6 ends with the question, before God’s wrath, “who can stand?” Chapter 7 answers, all who are “sealed” will stand. The “seal” is the Holy Spirit indwelling believers.

- In 7:4, John “hears” the number of the sealed is 144,000 a symbolic number that signifies the complete number of true believers, i.e., those “in Christ.” Then John “sees” (7:9) a multitude no one could number. The huge multitude is all believers “sealed” through the ages and now in heaven.

2. **Revelation 7:9- 12:** *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,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

- Then, an elder tells John about the multitude in heaven. They are safe in every respect.

3. **Revelation 7:15-17:** *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.¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.¹⁷ 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.”*

- Thus, the first half of chapter 7 concerns the church militant on earth. The second half of chapter 7 concerns the church triumphant in heaven.
- Verses 7:15-17 confirm the great multitude consists of “overcomers” who fought the good fight. As believers they followed Christ without fighting as the world fights. They faced hunger and thirst, heat and tears, endured suffering, as they sought to obey God. In heaven they will suffer no more.
- Since they stood firm in the Word of God, Paul says in Romans 8, they are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. On earth, they were God’s army, teaching, and living the gospel in the struggle against evil. In heaven they are the church triumphant worshipping and obeying God.
- On earth, we live in first half of Chapter 7. Evil remains around us and there are battles to be won, a judgment to be faced, but “in Christ” we are assured that the second half of chapter 7 will be ours.
- The “great multitude no one can number” results from God fulfilling His promise to Abraham.

4. **Genesis 22:17-18:** God said to Abraham, *“I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me.”*

- The descendants God promised Abraham include physical and spiritual descendants. The key is not genetic continuity. It is continuity in belief in God that results in their belief being counted as righteousness.

5. **Next Question:** One of the elders asked John who the multitude were and where they came from?

6. **Revelation 7:13-14:** *Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"¹⁴ 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.*

7. **What is the Great Tribulation?** Tribulation is defined as trouble or suffering. Tribulation can be "great" in intensity, extent, duration, etc. So, is great tribulation different "in kind" from tribulation or in "intensity, extent, and/or duration" or all the above?

- If all members of the "*great multitude no one can number*" (all the redeemed) came out of the great tribulation, then the great tribulation must necessarily include all of redemption history.
- That means the great tribulation began in Genesis when Adam and Eve sinned, died spiritually, lost their "as created" holiness. With the loss of holiness, they could no longer live in God's presence.
- They were cast out of the Garden into a world cursed because of their sin. Life was difficult. Thorns and thistles and other problems made growing food difficult. Their son Cain even killed his brother, Abel.
- So, Scripture describes tribulation as beginning with Adam and Eve's sin. The trouble and suffering they began to experience when cast out into the cursed world was indeed a great tribulation to them after having been always before sheltered in the Garden of Eden in the presence of God.
- After they sinned, suddenly everything seemed to "fall apart and they suffered." Until they sinned, Adam and Eve had known no trouble or suffering. The onset of tribulation was a great shock, startling and painful.
- In this way, trouble and suffering accompanied sin when sin came to the earth. Sin, trouble and suffering would be the norm on earth until the "last day" when God makes all things new.
- As the number of people on earth increased, sin increased, and tribulation with it.
- When our Redeemer became incarnate and implemented God's plan to free believers from sin's bonds, He suffered enormous tribulation and suffering that ended with His death by crucifixion.
- Jesus said, those who follow Him will also face tribulation in the form of persecution and trouble in the world. They will be delivered to affliction and hated for his name's sake. Yet, they should "be of good cheer" and "take heart" because He has overcome the world (John 16:33).
- Jesus also described a future tribulation, greater in intensity but not different in kind.

8. **Jesus' Statement on a "Great Tribulation":** Here is how Jesus' statement on a "great tribulation" occurred. A few days before He was crucified, Jesus left the Temple for the last time, and He and the disciples walked to the Mount of Olives.

- Jesus and the disciples had spent that day (Matthew 23) in the Temple in almost continuous conflict with the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said they were hypocrites and blind guides talking about God's requirements but personally not obedient to them. Jesus pronounced seven "woes" upon them.
- Two things about Jesus' closing comments. (1.) The woes were a declaration that bad things would befall the then current generation in Israel. (2.) Jesus laments over what is going to happen to Jerusalem and says goodbye to it.

9. **Matthew 23:32-36:** *Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.* ³³ *You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?* ³⁴ *Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,* ³⁵ *so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.* ³⁶ *Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

10. **Matthew 23:37-39:** *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!* ³⁸ *See, your house is left to you desolate.* ³⁹ *For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'*

- As they left the Temple, the disciples discussed its great magnificent buildings. Jesus told them, the buildings would be destroyed so completely that not one stone would remain on another.
- The disciples were shocked at the notion of the elaborate Temple with its huge stones being obliterated so completely. Oddly, they don't ask how such destruction could happen but ask when it will happen?
- They walked to the Mount of Olives and sat with Jesus looking back at the Temple. They asked three interconnected questions: "*When will these things be* (i.e., Temple destroyed), *and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*" (Matthew 24:3)
- As part of His answer pertaining to the end of the age, Jesus mentioned a future "great tribulation" unprecedented in history. Here is what He said:

11. **Matthew 24:21-22:** *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.* ²² *And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."*

- One vital question not asked is, what does "then" refer to? When would this great tribulation occur?

12. **About the Great Tribulation:** Jesus said, it will be a “*great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.*”

- Whatever constitutes the “*great tribulation,*” it will be greater tribulation than that experienced by Adam and Eve when they sinned, lost their holiness, died spiritually, lost everlasting life and began to die physically, were cast out of the Garden into a world cursed because of their sin, etc.
- It will be greater tribulation than that experienced in the great flood of Noah’s day when all people on earth were drowned except for Noah and his family. Only six people in total were saved.
- It will be greater tribulation than the Hebrews experienced in 400 years of slavery in Egypt.
- It will be tribulation greater than the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem and Temple with hundreds of thousands killed, no food, cannibalism, and internal fighting among themselves, and the forced ending of covenant (or an epidemic of epidemics)sacrificial worship of God.
- Not to mention, it will be tribulation greater than modern events like 6 million Jews horribly killed by the Nazis. (See the handout of lists of Epidemics and Wars for more examples.)
- You have copies of two examples of tribulation in the world. One is a list of wars, number of people killed, and what that number represents as a per cent of world population. The other is a similar list for epidemics killing at least a million people. The lists are a staggering perspective on tribulation.
- What tribulation in the future could be greater than the tribulation of the limited number of events we have mentioned? One obvious answer is nuclear war with warheads striking population centers around the globe. Another is a worldwide epidemic (or an epidemic of epidemics) that kills most of the world’s people.
- Or could the time of “great tribulation” Jesus spoke about be the time of God’s final judgment of sin?

13. **Next:** Back to the trumpet judgements in 8:6-12.