

Revelation Chapter 7

Revelation 7:1, And after ~~these things~~ [this] I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given [to them] to hurt the earth and the sea, 3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.



Revelation Chapter 7

Averký: These four angels appeared evidently as the fulfillers of the chastisement of God upon the world. One of the purposes set before them is *holding [back] the four winds ...* we think that all this in the greatest possible degree will occur at the coming of the Antichrist, and not in the Jewish land only, but over the whole earth, on the four corners of which, he says, there will stand angels as the performers of a service pre-assigned to them by God ...

But there appeared also *another angel* who had the *seal of the living God* in order to place this seal on the foreheads of the servants of God and thereby deliver them from the approaching chastisements.



This will primarily be fulfilled during the time of the coming of Antichrist, when the seal of the Life-giving Cross will distinguish the unfaithful from the faithful, who will bear the sign of Christ before them unashamed and with boldness ... the virtuous will need the angelic help before the coming of disasters, and this will be by the power of the seal of the Spirit which will be given us; but this seal will reveal its power only to the extent that we show our own activity (St. Andrew, chapter 19).

Archimandrite Athanasios: The foreheads of slaves or animals were sealed or branded, to identify them as property of a particular owner ... This method was also used to mark fugitives or slaves during the Roman Empire. When a slave escaped and later would be apprehended the letter F (or FUG) was burned on the forehead of this slave as a permanent reminder to him and everyone else of his attempted escape. He was a fugitive ...

The faithful will be sealed and thus find themselves under God's protection. ... God seals the members of His Church to safeguard them from the false Christs, the false prophets, and mainly the Antichrist whose deception will take on universal dimensions. This is the purpose of the living seal of God ... Only those who have the Spirit of God can detect deception ... the Spirit of God acts as an aid to detect delusion and protect them from falling into it ... The purpose of this protection is to keep us from worshiping the Antichrist, for the Antichrist also seals his followers as well [with the number "666".]

Revelation Chapter 7

But let us look at a similar sealing that took place in the times of the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel before the forced exile of Jews to Babylon. In Ezekiel Chapters 8 and 9 we see the righteous of Israel, those who mourn over the apostasy, idolatry, abominations that the leadership, the elders, the Sanhedrin, and the people had given themselves to after turning away from the Lord--a time very much like our day when witchcraft, idolatry, paganism, among many other -isms are recurring and increasing.

Eze 8:6 "He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations. 7 And He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. 8 Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. 9 And He said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. 10 So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. 11 And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients [elders] of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. 12 Then said He unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients [elders] of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth. 13 He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. 14 Then He brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz [a mesopotamian fertility god embodying the powers for new life in nature eachÄQ8I.KL= spring]. 15 Then said He unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. 16 And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. 17 Then He said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. 18 Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."

Eze 9:1 "He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. 2 And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar. 3 And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon He was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; 4 And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem,








Revelation Chapter 7

and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. 5 And to the others He said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: 6 Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men [elders] which were before the house. 7 And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. 8 And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? 9 Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not. 10 And as for Me also, Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. 11 And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me."

To them that mourned over the sins of Israel and only them is given an ink mark on their foreheads to protect them from those who are given authority to slay all the remainder. Just what was that ink mark? In the *Septuagint (Lxx)* the Greek word is *σημειον* which means *a mark by which a thing is known*. That fits the context well, since it is a mark by which the true Israelites who continue to put their trust in the Lord can be distinguished from the apostate Israelites who have forsaken the Lord and were now putting their trust in the idols and the gods of the pagan nations, for which they were condemned. However, it tells us nothing about the sign itself. For that we have to look to the Hebrew Masoretic text, where we read *ט*, *tav*, which is the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet in the square Aramaic script used today, which has the sound of a “t” but looks more like the shape of an “n”. This square Aramaic script only came into use around the 5th century BC (475 BC or slightly earlier). But the Prophet Ezekiel, 2-3 generations earlier, wrote in the old Hebrew/Phoenician script.¹ So the ink mark would actually have been a “cross,” like two crossed sticks. So the true Israelites in Ezekiel chapter 9 were marked with the “sign of the cross.”²

As for seals on foreheads in the form of the cross, in the Orthodox Church we are sealed for protection in baptism and chrismation with the seal of the Holy Spirit in the form of a cross with holy oil on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, lips, ears, the breast, hands, and the feet. Similarly, at Matins in our Vigils, during the Canon, after we venerate the Gospels and the festal icon, the

1. Before the first surrender of Jerusalem in 587 BC, Ezekiel was a functioning [priest](#) probably attached to the Jerusalem Temple staff. He was among those deported in 597 to Babylonia, where he was located at Tel-abib on the Kebar canal (near Nippur). It is evident that he was, among his fellow exiles, a person of uncommon stature. Ezekiel's religious call came in July 592 when he had a vision of the “throne-chariot” of God. He subsequently prophesied until 585 and then is not heard of again until 572. His latest datable utterance can be dated about 570 BC, 22 years after his first.

2. The Ancient picture  is a type of "mark," probably of two sticks crossed to mark a place, similar to the Egyptian hieroglyph , a picture of two crossed sticks. This letter has the meanings of "mark," "sign" and "signature." The Modern Hebrew, Arabic and Greek names for this letter is tav (or taw), a Hebrew word meaning, "mark." Hebrew, Greek and Arabic agree that the sound for this letter is "t." The early pictograph  evolved into  in the Middle Semitic script and continued to evolve into  in the Late Semitic Script. From the middle Semitic script is derived the Modern Hebrew . The Early Semitic script is the origin of the Greek and the Latin cross ().

Revelation Chapter 7

priest applies holy oil on our foreheads in the form of a cross before we partake of a portion of the Five Loaves. So sealing with a cross on our foreheads comes as no great surprise to us Orthodox.

St. Cyprian in his *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*, affirms in Book 2.22 “That in this sign of the Cross is salvation for all people who are marked on their foreheads. In Ezekiel the Lord says: “Pass through the midst of Jerusalem, and thou shalt mark the sign upon the men’s foreheads, who groan and grieve for the iniquities which are done in the midst of them.”

Revelation 7:4 *And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*

	FATHER	MOTHER	
Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand.	Judah	Leah	12,000
Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand.	Ruben	Leah	12,000
Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.	Gad	Zilpah	12,000
6 Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand.	Asher	Zilpah	12,000
Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand.	Nephthalim	Bilhah	12,000
Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand	Manasses	Asenath (Egypt)	12,000
Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand.	Simeon	Leah	12,000
Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand.	Levi	Leah	12,000
Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.	Issachar	Leah	12,000
Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand.	Zabulon	Leah	12,000
Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand.	Joseph	Rachel	12,000
Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.	Benjamin	Rachel	12,000
[Note: Of the tribe of Dan none were sealed]	[Dan]	[Bilhah]	[0]
[Note: Of the tribe of Ephraim none were sealed]	[Ephraim]	Asenath (Egypt)	[0]

There are different opinion on who these 144,000 are and when they were sealed. Some think that these 144,000 will be sealed/saved in the time of the Antichrist. Some say that these Israelite tribes are not Jews only, but also include the Gentiles grafted into the Church. But the language *all the tribes of the children of Israel* and then the listing of twelve specific Patriarchs [11 children of Jacob/Israel + 1 child of Joseph, minus the tribe of Dan] witness against that possibility. So I believe St. Andrew to be spot on in his interpretation:

St. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, Book 7, Chapter 19*, in *Ancient Christian Texts, Greek Commentaries on Revelation: Œcumenius and Andrew of Caesaria*, IVP Academic (an imprint of Intervarsity Press), Downers Grove, IL, 2011, p. 139.

“The exact equality of each tribe seems to me to show the utter fruitfulness of the apostolic seed, since twelve multiplied by twelve and multiplied by the perfect number of a thousand yields the thousands here indicated. For these were the disciples of that seed that out of love for humankind fell on the earth and brought forth the various fruits of universal salvation.”

It is important to recognize that these 144,000 are true descendants of the 12 tribes of

Revelation Chapter 7

Israel, physically, but also spiritually, true Israelites in whom there was no guile, i.e., the spiritual children of Christ and His 12 disciples multiplying rapidly and forming the New Testament Church.

That number, 144,000, is thought to be a symbolic number by many Patristic writers, not a specific number. However, the Jehovah's Witnesses do take it literally. The Jehovah's Witnesses, in their great but misdirected zeal, strive to be one of these literal 144,000 through their outreach efforts, because they believe that only these 144,000 obtain salvation. Consequently, you can ask them which of the 12 tribes of Israel are they descended from since to be one of these 144,000, they have to be a physical descendant of one of the 12 above.

In the Acts of the Apostles 21:17-20 when St. Paul visited the Church in Jerusalem, St. Luke writes:

17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. 19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. 20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him [Paul], Thou seest, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law.

In other words, there were thousands of Jews who had believed in Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah (Christ) of Israel in Judaea!

Revelation 7:4-8 *And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Juda twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Manasses** twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Joseph** twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand. [Note: Of the tribe of Dan none were sealed]*

[See detail from the above fresco showing an angel placing the seal on the foreheads of the tribes of the children of Israel.]

Revelation Chapter 7



First, we notice that the tribe of Manasses is listed. He was not one of the 12 sons of Jacob/Israel, but the son of the Patriarch Joseph. Nevertheless, Manasses, whose mother was Asenath the daughter of Potipher, the priest of On of Egypt, is listed here as one of the twelve tribes here. Why was he listed here? The answer can be found in Genesis 48:5: Jacob in blessing his son Joseph's two sons, said that Joseph's two sons would be reckoned as his own. Hence, each became a "son" of Jacob/Israel as well, and each was allotted his own inheritance in the Land of Israel. That makes 14 "sons" of Israel instead of 12. If the tribe of Manasses is mentioned here, then why not the tribe of Ephraim, the younger brother who was blessed over and above Manasses the firstborn, by the right hand of Jacob over the objections of Joseph? The tribe of Ephraim and its leader Jeroboam rebelled against King Rehoboam the son of King Solomon. He split the Kingdom in two by setting up a northern kingdom of Israel and incurred divine wrath by building two rival Temples in Dan and Bethel staffed by non-levitical priests. He was a rebel and made himself a rival King to King Rehoboam of Judah. But the tribe of Ephraim was also syncretist, mixing the Godly faith with the fertility cult of Baal. Unrepentant for generations, it was finally swept away by the Assyrians in 721 BC along with the rest of the northern 10 tribes].

Secondly, there is the issue of the tribe of Dan which is missing from the list. St. Andrew of Caesarea states: "And this is to be noted, **that the tribe of Dan, out of which the antichrist is to be born**, is not arranged with the other tribes."

What are the reasons for St. Andrew saying that the Antichrist will arise from the tribe of Dan? There are plenty of clues in the Old Testament Scriptures that our Patristic fathers have referenced to support their beliefs.

In the Book of Judges, we often read the phrase, *Everyone did what was right in their own eyes because there was no King*. And that got the Israelites into much trouble, especially the tribe of Dan. The Danites had trouble taking possession from the Canaanites of that portion

Revelation Chapter 7

of the Land of Israel allotted to them by the Lord (Joshua 19:40-47), so most of them left their allotted portion in the *Shephalah* (the non-coastal lowlands directly to the west of Jerusalem) and traveled far north to where a very peaceful people lived (well north in Lebanon/Syria), an area not allocated by the Lord to the 12 tribes of Israel through Joshua, and conquered it instead:

Judges 18:27 *And they [the Danites] took that [the idol] which Micah [a man of Mount Ephraim] had made, and the priest whom he had; and they came to Laish, to a people tranquil and secure, and they struck them with the edge of the sword. And the city they burnt with fire ... 29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel, but actually Laish was the name of the city at first. 30. And the children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image. And Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Menasseh, (both) he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the exile of the land. [by the Assyrians].* Thus the northern Danites were self-willed, disobedient, merciless, murderous, idolatrous, and placed themselves outside of the Land of Promise maintaining their own sanctuary, own priests, and worshiped their own idol there until they were swept away by the Assyrians.

St. Irenaeus (AD 130-202), Bishop of Lyon, in *Against Heresies, Book V, Ch XXX*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, I*, p. 559, discusses Jeremiah's prophecy about the tribe of Dan:

“And Jeremiah does not merely point out his [the Antichrist's] sudden coming, but he even indicates the tribe from which he shall come, where he says, “*We shall hear the voice of his swift horses from Dan; the whole earth shall be moved by the voice of the neighing of his galloping horses: he shall also come and devour the earth, and the fulness thereof, the city also, and they that dwell therein.*” [Jer 8:16] This, too, is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse along with those which are saved. Rev 7:5-7.” [The Danites (though not all) corrupted the Hebrew church and the Levitical priesthood, by idolatry, (Judges 18), and forfeited the blessings of the old covenant.]

Hippolytus (AD 170-235), a Roman Presbyter, in his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, V*, p. 207, writes:

“14. Thus did the Scriptures preach before-time of this lion and lion's whelp [of Judah]. And in like manner also we find it written regarding Antichrist. For Moses speaks thus: “*Dan is a lion's whelp, and he shall leap from Bashan [Golan Heights/Syria].*” [Deut 23:22] But that no one may err by supposing that this is said of the Saviour, let him attend carefully to the matter. “*Dan,*” he says, “*is a lion's whelp;*” and in naming the tribe of Dan, he declared clearly the tribe from which Antichrist is destined to spring. For as Christ springs from the tribe of Judah, so Antichrist is to spring from the tribe of Dan. And that the case stands thus, we see also from the words of Jacob: [Genesis 49:17: *Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.*] What, then, is meant by the *serpent* but Antichrist, that deceiver [the *serpent*] who is mentioned in Genesis [3:13 *And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. 14 And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast*

Revelation Chapter 7

done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: 15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed [the antichrist] and her seed [Christ Jesus]; it [Christ] shall bruise thy head, and thou [antichrist] shalt bruise his heel, who deceived Eve and supplanted Adam (πτερνίσσας, bruised Adam's heel)? But since it is necessary to prove this assertion by sufficient testimony, we shall not shrink from the task.

“15. That it is in reality out of the tribe of Dan, then, that that tyrant and king, that dread judge, that son of the devil, is destined to spring and arise, the prophet testifies when he says, *Dan shall judge his people, as (he is) also one tribe in Israel*. [In other words, Dan will rule over all the other tribes as if there were one tribe, from Genesis 49:16] ... For Jeremiah also speaks to this effect: *From Dan we are to hear the sound of the swiftness of his horses: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing, of the driving of his horses* [Jer 8:16]. And another prophet [apocryphal?] says: *He shall gather together all his strength, from the east even to the west. They whom he calls, and they whom he calls not, shall go with him. He shall make the sea white with the sails of his ships, and the plain black with the shields of his armaments. And whosoever shall oppose him in war shall fall by the sword*. That these things, then, are said of no one else but that tyrant, and shameless one, and adversary of God, we shall show in what follows.”

Thus, the Antichrist will be [a Jew] from the tribe of Dan, and that is the reason Dan is not listed in Revelation Chapter 7 among the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel.

Although 12 tribes were mentioned, the “tribe” of Manasse (the son of Joseph the son of Jacob/Israel) was added to the list because Jacob counted him and his younger brother Ephraim as his own sons. However, the Ephraimites were not listed as a tribe-- perhaps because in their pursuit of being “first among equals” of the the 12/14 tribes of Israel:

(1) they rebelled against the Monarchy of Judah (against the grandson of King David, Reheboam), dividing the Kingdom into two parts, placing their own Jeroboam as king of the 10 Northern tribes;

(2) they introduced a syncretist/ecumenist idolatrist religion in Israel by adding the worship of Baal to the faith of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;

(3) they built two Temples, in Bethel and Dan, in contempt of the Law of Moses which forbade more than one -- the Tabernacle which evolved into the Temple in Jerusalem; and, lastly,

(4) they ordained their own non-levitical priests, again, in contempt of the Mosaic Law. The Northern idolatrous Kingdom of Israel led by the Ephraimite “royalty” continued unrepentant until finally conquered & deported to Babylon and Persia by King Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria.

We also noted that the tribe of Dan was missing from the list because, according to our Orthodox tradition, the Antichrist is to arise out of the tribe of Dan (see St. Irenaeus, St. Hippolytus, St. Andrew of Caesarea).

Today, now that the representative 144,000 have been sealed, we will see in our passage in Revelation the results of the true faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob both in Ancient Israel and in the Church of the New Testament from Jerusalem, Judæa, Samaria,

Revelation Chapter 7

Antioch, and to the ends of the earth.

Revelation 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no ~~man~~ [one] could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with **white robes**, and **palms in their hands**; 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

11 And **all the angels** stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 Saying, Amen: [the] Blessing, and [the] glory, and [the] wisdom, and [the] thanksgiving, and [the] honour, and [the] power, and [the] might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, **These are they which came** [come] out of ~~great tribulation~~ [the affliction, the great one], and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall ~~dwell among them~~ [pitch a tabernacle over them]. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead [shepherd] them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from [out of] their eyes.

Revelation Chapter 7



So of whom is this great multitude composed of? That is a very important question. The Elder who asked St. John who these multitudes were who were dressed in white robes, answers his own question as St. John in his humility defers to him. But the answer is not as clear as it appears on the surface. Our Patristic Fathers also are not totally unified on this point either. So Let's see how they interpret the answer from ancient times to the present.

Victorinus, Bishop of Pettau (died in the persecutions of Diocletian c. AD 303) in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ANF, Vol 7: “What the great multitude out of every tribe implies, is to show the **number of the elect out of all believers, who, being cleansed by baptism in the blood of the Lamb, have made their robes white, keeping the grace which they**

Revelation Chapter 7

have received.” [Victorinus is very true to the biblical text.]

Ecumenius, (highly educated layman, c. 6th century AD): It says, *And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb*. To be sure, one might think that robes dipped in blood would be red, not white. And so, how is it that they have become white? Because, according to the opinion of all-wise Paul [Rom. 6:3], baptism is accomplished into the death of the Lord and wipes one clean from every filth of sin, so that those baptized in him are made white and clean. However, the reception of the life-giving blood of Christ also gives the same grace, for the Lord said concerning his blood that it was poured out *for many* and *for the sake of many* and *for the forgiveness of sins*. Therefore, these serve God forever, and God dwells among them. Indeed, one of the saints said that this dwelling of God is the never-ending remembrance of God that remains in the souls of the saints. Rightly, then, does God dwell with those who serve him day and night.

St. Andrew of Caesarea (AD 563-637): “These are the ones of whom David spoke: *I shall number them, and they will be more than the sand* (Psalm 138:18³). Namely, **these are those who long ago struggled as martyrs for the sake of Christ and those from every tribe and tongue who will fight valiantly at the end of time**. By the outpouring of their own blood for the sake of Christ, some have made white and others will make white the robes of their deeds. And they have in their hands palm branches, which are symbolic of victory and which are good, straight and white as are their hearts. And they form a chorus around the divine throne of the godly rest, as grateful family members ascribing the victory over the demons to him who provides it.” [St. Andrew seems to restrict the multitude to martyrs but not just from the Great Tribulation under the Antichrist -- but of those long ago as well.]

The Venerable Bede (AD 672-735) in his *Explanation of the Apocalypse* https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bede/untitled-12.shtml#_Toc385608320 writes on Rev. 7:14: “washed” -- **He speaks not of martyrs alone. They are washed in their own blood. But the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, cleanses the whole Church from all sin, therefore are they before the throne of God. For they are accounted worthy to stand there together in the service of God, who in the midst of adverse things are faithful confessors of His Name.** [For Bede, it is the whole Church, not just martyrs alone.]

Archimandrite Athanasios (1927-2006), in *Revelation: The Seven Seals*, Zoe Press, Dunlop, CA, 2014, p. 220-2: “It is the Church Triumphant and not just the people of Israel. The Church Triumphant is from all nations, tribes, languages, centuries, and of all seasons ... The crowd is immeasurable from a human perspective ... [Like Victorinus and Bede, Archmand. Athanasios sees a broad multitude from all peoples, places, and times.]

“The white robes worn by the multitude in this scene are the garments of the martyrs, all

3. *Psalm 138:17-18 But to me, exceedingly honourable are Thy friends, O Lord; their principalities are made exceedingly strong. I will count them, and they shall be multiplied more than the sand; I awoke and I am still with Thee.*

Revelation Chapter 7

those who struggled victoriously against sin. The white robe is the symbol of their pure and renewed life. All saints are martyrs, either through blood or conscience. Yet, whether by blood or conscience, the important thing is that they are martyrs of the ascetic spirit that permeates the entire gospel. Anyone who does not wish to hear about the concept of asceticism - that he must become an ascetic - is, in reality, outside the spirit of the gospel, outside the spirit of the cross of Christ.”

Thus, the Orthodox Tradition does not consider them to be solely martyrs from the Great Tribulation period. Rather, they all have had their robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb -- by baptism, by the Holy Mysteries in communion -- not in their own blood or it would have said so. They have come out of the affliction, the great one. Affliction has been going on for centuries, and will certainly increase under the Antichrist to the point that unless the Lord cut short those days, no one would have survived. Historically, tribulation has at times been fierce and prolonged whether under the Jews, the early Roman Empire, the Arians, the Iconoclasts, the Muslims, the Franks (Roman Catholics), the Russian and Chinese Communists, etc. There has been great persecution during the whole history of the Church. But the gates of Hades have not and will not prevail against the Church. Christ, the Lamb of God, and the Good Shepherd protects Flock, feeding them and leading them to Eternal Life in the Kingdom of Heaven. There, He pitches His tabernacle over them/dwells among them to protect them where they rejoice in Him, serve Him day and night, where they no longer hunger and thirst, where He wipes away all their tears in a New Heaven and a New Earth. They are the faithful throughout history, who have put their trust in Christ and His blood, not their own works, not in their martyrdom for the faith, but solely in the Lamb of God and His gift of salvation whether they were martyrs or not. They are those who have confessed their faith in Christ Jesus before men and before God.

These multitudes are the result of the previous 144,000, the true Israel of God. Yet the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel (through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) include the salvation of the Gentiles, the nations as well, hence this countless multitude St. John sees before the Throne of God. It is the Church in Heaven. In the whole of chapter 7 we can see that their *salvation is of the Jews*, even as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well: *Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews*. Indeed, it was God’s plan that Israel would be a Kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation. They were to be His servants to enlighten the nations and bring them to faith as we see in the Law and the Prophets:

Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. ***6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*** But God knew in advance that they, as a nation, would fail in that undertaking. So, the Father sent His Son, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, that “seed” of Abraham, born to woman, to undertake that mission as we read in the Prophet Isaiah!

KJV Isaiah 49:6 It is too small a thing [trifling] that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make of You a Light to the nations so that My salvation יְשׁוּעָה [my Yeshua, my Jesus] may reach to the ends of the

Revelation Chapter 7

earth.

Lxx Isaiah 49:5-6 *And now, thus says the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his own servant, to gather Jacob to Him and Israel. And He said to Me, It is a great thing for Thee to be called My Servant, to establish the tribes of Jacob, and to recover the dispersion of Israel: behold, I have given Thee for the covenant of a race [for the Jews], for a light of the Gentiles, that Thou shouldst be for salvation to the end of the earth.*

Orthodox Worship:

Here in Revelation 7 we see the Great Divine Liturgy in Heaven, that great salvation of the Jews and Gentiles together. We see the numbers of the martyrs previously seen under the heavenly altar now filled up to completion -- and they are innumerable, standing among all the faithful. All are **standing before the throne** even as we Orthodox stand before the altar. They cry out in a loud voice expressive of the immense joy they have: *Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb* -- it is the joy of their salvation, their redemption coupled with immense thanksgiving and tremendous gratitude toward God. They hold palms in their hands as did ancient Israel at the appointed feast of Tabernacles, as we Orthodox Christians do on Palm Sunday when we cry out, *Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord, Hosannah to the Son of David, Hosannah in the highest.*⁴ They are gathered together before the angels, living creatures, and the elders who worship and prostrate before the Father and His Son the Lamb while chanting a 7-fold doxology: *[the] Blessing, and [the] glory, and [the] wisdom, and [the] thanksgiving, and [the] honour, and [the] power, and [the] might, be unto our God for ever and ever.*⁵ To which the chanter[s] respond *Amen*. “Look at this harmony, this absolute harmony, of the doxology of the saints and the angels, and as you will see, it is magnificent.”

St. Andrew of Caesarea describes this scene thusly: “Behold the one Church of angels and of people stand in a circle around the throne and the Lamb.” In our Divine Liturgical Services in the Orthodox Church we mystically enter into the joyous worship in Heaven even as St. John personally entered into the worship with the multitudes, the angels, the 4 living creatures, the elders, and the Holy Trinity. Let us strive to gain and maintain the grace of the holy Spirit, and continue to wash ourselves clean in the blood of the Lamb, which we partake of in the holy mysteries.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

4. Compare during Sukkot: the Jewish priests would say, *Give thanks to HASHEM (THE LORD), Please HASHEM bring salvation now*, and *Please HASHEM bring success now*. On the *Great Hoshanna*, this would be repeated over and over again! הוֹשִׁיָּהּ *hoshiah* = *bring salvation* is a verb form of יֵשׁוּעָה *Yeshua*, Jesus' name in Hebrew. Here in Rev. 7, in Heaven, the LORD has brought salvation in the person of His Son יֵשׁוּעָה *Yeshua*, Jesus.

5. The usage of the article “*the*” in the original Greek text here emphasizes the absolute nature of each attribute, and each belong to God exclusively!