Chapter 6 closes with a question, “For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” Chapter 7 answers that question; before we get to the answer it is important to note that chapter 7 is the first of several parenthetical passages; these are passages that interrupt the action in order to insert a word of encouragement to the reader.

Up to this point in Revelation, the news is not so good; the Antichrist has come upon the stage of the world; he has brought a false peace, then war, followed by famine and death; then we find that many if not most of those who come to Christ during the great Tribulation are martyred; then we find those martyrs in heaven crying out to God as to how long He is going to allow this bloodshed to take place on earth; the answer they get is that not enough have died by shedding their blood for their faith; there seems to be a specific number that God has in mind that must be martyred before He steps in and acts on behalf of the saints.

Next, all hell breaks loose on earth as great earthquakes shake the planet; the stars of heaven fall to the earth like ripened figs, the sun becomes black as sackcloth, the moon turns a blood red and every mountain and island is moved out of its place; everyone from kings to slaves are running for cover while praying to Mother Nature “to hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb”; then comes that question, “Who is able to stand?”

Chapter 7 not only answers that question but speaks of a great revival on the earth; there are two distinct sets of people who get saved during the Tribulation; the first 8 verses speak of Israel—many Jews will come to know Christ and are saved; the last 9 verses speak of the Gentiles; there will be multitudes beyond number who will not be fooled by the Antichrist and will take their stand for the Lord God in the day of His wrath.
The Stationing of Four Angels Plus Another (7:1-3)

*The placement of four angels...* “After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth... (7:1a); The Scriptures have been called unscientific for speaking of the earth as having four corners; that is equivalent to calling the earth flat; however the prophet Isaiah wrote that the earth was a sphere; he wrote of God as “He who sits above the circle [sphere] of the earth” (Isaiah 40:22; Proverbs 8:27); according to scientist Dr. Henry Morris, “a modern day mariner or a geologist will speak of the four quadrants of the compass, which is equivalent to speaking of the four corners of the earth in terms of the four directions—north, south, east, and west”; the scene is simply four angels, one positioned in the north, another in the south, another in the east, and the fourth in the west.

*The power of the angels...* “...holding the four winds of the earth, that the winds should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree” (7:1b.); these angels are holding back the winds of destruction that are to come on the earth; wind in Scripture is a symbol of judgment (Jeremiah 49:36; 51:1; 2 Samuel 22:11); these winds were to do harm to the earth, the sea and the trees (7:2-3).

*The purpose of a fifth angel...* “Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea or the trees till we have sealed the servants of God on their foreheads’” (7:2-3); a fifth angel comes on the scene ascending from out of the east having the seal of God; he tells the angels to hold back the winds of judgment until the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads; the purpose of the sealing is to protect those servants from the dangers of the Tribulation; no harm or death was to come upon them (9:4).

In the book of Ezekiel the prophet speaks of a man with a writer's inkhorn who is to go throughout Jerusalem and put a mark on the forehead of all in the city who are crying over the wickedness of the city (Ezekiel 9:4); interestingly, the mark was the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, †au, and in early times was written in the form of a slanted cross similar to our letter X; the cross was to spare those from death, for all who did not have the mark on their forehead would be killed and none were to be spared (Ezekiel 9:5-6).

Paul tells us that all Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise as a guarantees of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22); the idea of
sealing goes back to the ancient world of kings and emperors who owned a signet ring; if the king had a document that he wanted to make official policy, he would place his signet ring in wax and then stamp the document with the ring which would leave an impression of its own likeness there upon; the seal was a sign of ownership that this document belonged to the king and he intended to enforce the contents and conditions thereof.

When we are sealed with the Holy Spirit it is God saying to us, “You are Mine; you belong to Me and you are guaranteed your heavenly inheritance as well as all the blessings that I have promised”; another way of putting it is: when we are sealed with the Holy Spirit our salvation is assured for we belong to God as His child!

In Revelation, the great Tribulation has just begun and there are servants of God who are being sealed with the seal of God so they cannot be harmed once the winds of destruction from the four corners of the earth begin to blow.

The four angels standing in the four directions of a compass are there to release the winds of judgment, but another angel tells them to hold back until all God’s special servants are protected by the seal of the living God.

The Sealing of 144,000 Jewish Evangelists (7:4-8)

The number that were sealed... “And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of Israel were sealed”; it was twelve thousand from each tribe: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin (7:4-8).

The order of the tribes

In the OT there are a number of different listings of these tribes and the order is not always the same; sometimes the order of birth is followed as in Genesis chapters 29 through 35; sometimes the order of Jacob’s blessing is followed as in Genesis 49; sometimes the order of encampment in Canaan is followed as in Numbers 2; sometimes the order of the census before the invasion of the land of Canaan is followed, such as Numbers 26; sometimes the order of blessing and cursing is followed as in Deuteronomy 27; sometimes the order of Moses’ blessing is followed as in Deuteronomy 33; sometimes the order of the princes is followed as in Numbers 1; sometimes the order of inheritance in the Promised land is followed as in Joshua chapters 13 through 22; sometimes the order of the wives and concubines is followed as in 1 Chronicles 2 through 8; sometimes the
order of the gates of the city of the Millennial Jerusalem is followed as in Ezekiel 48; so there are many different orders the 12 tribes are listed; yet there are always twelve including or excluding the tribes of Levi, Dan, Ephraim, and Joseph.

Of the 144,000, the first tribe named is Judah; but Judah wasn’t the first born, Reuben was; the reason Reuben was not first mentioned is that he lost his birthright because he sexually defiled his own father’s bed and was moved down the primogenitor role.

The omission of some tribes

Another interesting observation is 12,000 from tribe of Levi; Levi was the priestly tribe he but never had territory in the land; they were included because the tribe of Dan is left out; Dan was the first tribe to fall into idolatry (Judges 18:30) and was the only tribe that failed to conquer its territory (Judges 1:34); Jacob prophesied over Dan that his tribe would be “a serpent by the way; a viper by the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider shall fall backwards” (Genesis 49:17); it was because Dan brought idolatry into Israel that his name was blotted out and replaced by the tribe of Levi (Deuteronomy 29:18-21); in the Millennial listing of the tribes Dan is included (Ezekiel 48:2).

Another observation is the sons of Joseph, who were Ephraim and Manasseh; only Manasseh is mentioned and Joseph takes the place of Ephraim; Joseph never had a tribe named after him; Ephraim was used in the OT from the 8th century BC as a substitute name for the Northern Kingdom (Isaiah 11:33; Jeremiah 7:15; Hosea 5:13); his name is omitted from the 144,000 because the tribe was addicted to idols and was a defector from the house of David as they allied with Judah’s enemies (1 Kings 12); so Ephraim’s place is taken by his father Joseph.

The nation that was sealed... “the tribes of Israel...”; the 144,000 are from Israel, yet the Jewish people today do not know from which tribe they came; all the records were lost when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD; yet God knows who they are; however in recent years, DNA testing is being done by orthodox Jews to determine those who are from the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe; they believe the temple will be rebuilt on Temple Mount and they are preparing a priesthood to offer the sacrifices.
The 144,000 and the Jehovah Witnesses

There are those that deny that the 144,000 are from the tribes of Israel even though that is what the text plainly says; the Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that they have special insight into who they are; of course they are JW’s; in fact this cult has divided mankind into three classes: 1) the Mordecai- Naomi class: that is the 144,000 JW’s who have been chosen by Jehovah to be in heaven; they are also referred to as “the remnant”; 2) the Ruth-Esther class: those are the faithful JW’s who are not part of the 144,000 but are the meek who will inherit the earth following the resurrection of the dead; 3) the Jonadab class: those who might receive an earthly reward if they would only support “the faithful and wise servant class” who are today’s committed JW’s; if you are not in one of these three classes you will be annihilated since JW’s do not believe in hell.

The 144,000 and Ellen White of the Seventh Day Adventists

Ellen White was the founder of the Seventh Day Adventists; in her Early Writings, pp. 39, 40, she says, “Wings were given to me, and an angel attended to me from the city to a place that was bright and glorious. The grass of the place was living green, and the birds warbled a sweet song. The inhabitants of the place were of all sizes, they were noble, majestic, and lovely. They bore the express image of Jesus, and their countenances beamed with holy joy, expressive of the freedom and happiness of the place... I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again. Then the angel said, “You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God.”

It seems as though Ellen White took a trip to heaven and was with the 144,000.

She then writes about a Mrs. Hastings who died and was sealed and would be with the 144,000; she further said that the 144,000 will be made up of Americans only, none from other lands; yet Scripture says they were Jews from the land of Israel.

The 144,000 and Replacement Theology

The salvation of the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Jacob clearly teaches us that God still has a plan to save the Jew; Replacement Theology teaches that God has rejected Israel because Israel has rejected their Messiah; therefore all the
promises God made to Israel, now belong to the Church and the Church is now the Israel of God.

God has not rejected His covenant people; Paul in Romans 11 asks, “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (Romans 11:1-2). Then Paul goes on to speak of Elijah who felt alone and whose life was in danger after he had won the contest with the Gods on Mount Carmel; the prophets of Baal were killing God’s prophets and he wondered if he was the only one left that did not bow a knee to Baal; God responded, “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal”; then Paul says, “Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:3-5); then Paul goes on to speak of that remnant of Jews saying, “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’”

God still has a plan for the tribes of Jacob to restore the preserved one’s of Israel (see Isaiah 49:6); yes, God still has a plan to bring salvation to the Jews where they will come to know Jesus as their Messiah; part of that plan involves the 144,000 Jews; once the Tribulation begins these 144,000 will come to know the Messiah, perhaps through the preaching of the two witnesses who appear on the scene for 1260 days before they are martyred; these witnesses most likely are Moses and Elijah, who assist in the conversion of these Jews (11:1-14); they in turn will lead millions of other Jews to the Lord Jesus Christ as well as millions of Gentiles.

The nature of the 144,000 who were sealed:

1. They are the children of Israel (7:4).
2. They are virgins, undefiled by women (14:4).
3. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes (14:4).
4. They were redeemed from among men (14:4).
5. They were the firstfruits of God and to the Lamb (14:4).
6. They were without deceit nor fault (14:5).
7. They become “bodyguards” for the Millennial Temple as they will stand on Mount Zion in Jerusalem with the Lamb (14:1).
8. They have the Father’s name on their foreheads (14:1).
9. They sing a song no one else can sing (14:3).
The first vision of John in chapter 7 is the salvation of a Jewish remnant from out of the great Tribulation.

**The Salvation of a Great Multitude (7:9-17)**

*The presence of a great multitude in heaven...* “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues....” (7:9a); who are these people but Gentile nations that have come to know Christ as their Lord and Savoir; more people will be saved during the time of the great Tribulation than at any other seven year period in history; the wrath of God on the earth is having a positive effect; sometimes you have to scare the hell out of people before they get serious with God and His Son Jesus Christ.

I gave my life to Christ when I was 10 years old; my mother asked me why I made that decision and to get baptized; I remember saying, “I don’t want to go to hell”; the thought of hell frightened me even as a 10 year old; it may not be the best motive to come to Christ, but certainly better than not coming to Christ at all; I have often known people throughout my ministry that came to Christ during crisis moments in their lives.

What brought these Gentiles to Christ? It was the Jewish people, especially the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who were sent out throughout the entire world proclaiming the gospel; Isaiah tells us how God is going to use the Jews to bring the Gentiles to the Lord; it is the tribes of Jacob that are “to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will give you as light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6); the psalmist prays, “God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all the nations” (Psalm 67:1).

God chose the Jews in the first place to be a light to the Gentiles, (Psalm 147:19-20; Romans 3:1-2) but they failed their mission; God brought partial blindness to Israel for their failure to fulfill their mission and so He turned to the Gentiles to carry His message to the world (Romans 11:25); during the Tribulation, things are reversed; the Jews finally fulfill their God given purpose and carry the gospel to the whole earth; this will also be true during Christ’s millennial reign (Zechariah 8:23).

*The particulars about a great multitude in heaven...*
1. The place of the great multitude... “...standing before the throne and before the Lamb...” (7:9b); when we get to heaven we are going to be before the throne of God and before Jesus the Lamb; what a spectacular sight that will be to behold the glory of God radiating from the throne and to stand in the presence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2. The purity of the great multitude... “...clothed with white robes...” (7:9c); as we stand before the God and the Lamb we are pure, holy, blameless, and perfect in His sight!

3. The possession of the great multitude... “...with palm branches in their hands” (7:9d); this ought to remind us of Palm Sunday when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem; people lined the way throwing palm branches in His path and hailing Him as King (John 12:13); so in heaven we will wave palm branches and hail Jesus as our King, our Lord, and our Savior.

4. The praise of the great multitude... “and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (7:10); the most inspiring moment I ever had in worship was in Calcutta, India; that is the most hopeless place I have ever been; dead bodies lying in the street; naked women sitting on the curb, cows lying in the middle of the street; sitting in the middle of major intersections there were beggars whose legs had been cut off by the local mafia, who would place them there for their own profits; a trip down the Ganges River was a floating horse head and body parts of the dead who were tossed into the river because the family could not come up with $5.00 to have them cremated on a piece of wood; then a visit to a Hindu temple where the people are giving the first fruits of the garden to Hindu priests who whack off the head of a goat that they might have good fortune from their pagan god.

On Sunday I go to church where thousands of people dressed as nicely as they could afford packed that church; standing they began to sing: “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb”; they were acknowledging the sovereignty of God —that He is in control; tears came down my cheeks as I saw a congregation who did not give up hope in a loving God in spite of their dreadful, seemingly hopeless surroundings.
The praise of those in heaven... “All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God...” (7:11)

1. As to their worship... They “fell on their faces”; the most common word for worship in the NT is proskuneo, meaning “to lie prostrate” before God; “to fall on your face”; most of us would have a hard time doing that as we get older; getting up might be a problem, but that is how we will worship in heaven.

2. As to their words... “saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen’” (7:12-13); part of worship is telling God of His greatness and being thankful for what He has done for us.

The problem of their identity...

1. The asking of an elder... “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” (7:13); even in heaven there are things to be learned; haven’t we all said at one time, “When I see my Maker, I am going to ask Him about that?” when we get to heaven we will have all our questions answered.

2. The answer of the angel... “And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.... These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’” (7:14).

The promise to the multitude...

1. Their place in the kingdom of God... “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 dwell among them” (7:15); there is no night in heaven (21:25), so the phase “day and night” must refer to that which continually goes on nonstop; there will be endless praise before Him who sits on the throne.

   Also there is no temple in heaven (21:22), so it must refer to the throne of God or the heavenly Holy of Holies with the Ark of the Covenant where God dwells in transcend glory (see 11:19; Exodus 26:31-37).
2. Their provision from God... “They shall neither hunger or thirst anymore...” (7:16a); they came out of the great Tribulation where many died from starvation because of a great famine (6:5-6); there will be food in heaven and we will enjoy eating it; food at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9-10) and fruit from the tree of life (Revelation 22:1-2).

3. Their protection from God... “The sun shall not strike them, nor any heat...” (7:16b); famines come from three sources: the ravages of war, dictators controlling the food supply, and extreme heat from the sun without any rain; perhaps all of these are the cause of the famine during the Tribulation; the wars, the Antichrist controlling the economy and God’s wrath holding back the rain during a time of stifling heat; whatever happens during the Tribulation it is spoken of as God’s wrath for “the great day of His wrath has come” (Revelation 6:17).

4. Their peace from God... “...for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (7:17); it is wonderful to know that whatever our plot has been on earth, for those of us in Christ a better day is coming when we will worship Him before the throne; He will provide all our needs; He will protect us from all harm, and He will wipe away all tears from our eyes; by His grace, both Jew and Gentile will be given the opportunity to dwell with Him forever and ever for salvation has come to both the Jew and the Gentile.

The 144,000 are certainly to be admired for they stood faithful to God in the midst of His wrath as well as a great multitudes of people—Jews and Gentiles alike who came to Christ during the great Tribulation; they too get our respect for they stood faithful even to the point of death; we do not know what hardships lie before us, but it is imperative that whatever the cost, we must remain faithful if we too are to worship before the throne of God and enjoy all His blessings. Amen!