

SESSION 4

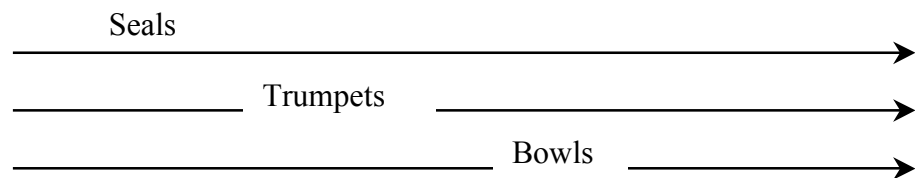
REVELATION 6:1-8:1
Cycle One: The Seal Judgements

I. OVERVIEW OF THE TRIBULATION JUDGMENTS

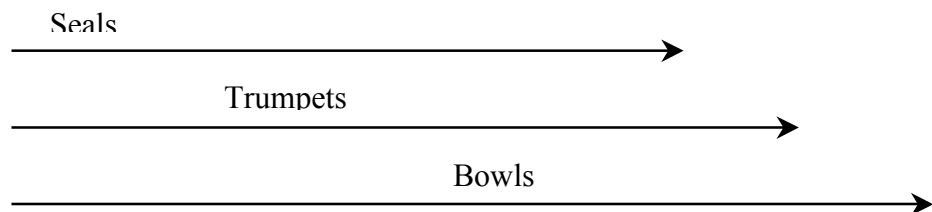
- A. Question
 What is the relationship of the seals, trumpets and bowls? Is the sequencing one of time or vision?
- B. Suggestions:
 - 1. Simple Sequential

SEALS							TRUMPETS							BOWLS						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

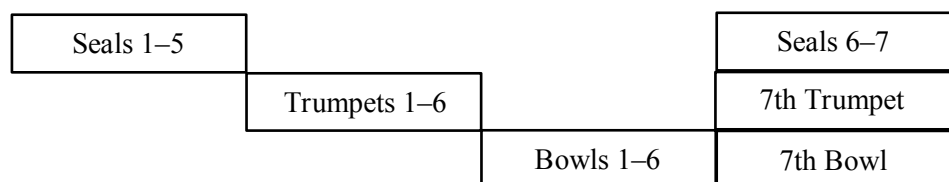
- 2. Parallel (simultaneous or recapitulation)



- 3. Parallel-Advancing



- 4. "Successive-final viewpoint" (so Dale R. Davis)



5. Unfolding

1st Seal	2nd Seal	3rd Seal	4th Seal	5th Seal	6th Seal	7th Seal
						7 Trumpets
						7 B

- Some may be ongoing.
- Some may be a “one time shot” (even a short duration)

II. OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURE:

- A. There is always a break before the 7th judgement, and thus the 7th judgement is set off as being distinct.
- B. There is no 7th seal stated or 7th trumpet (though Davis [pp 154-56] objects that there is).
- C. There is an increasing intensification from one series to the next: “each series raises the crescendo of divine judgement to a higher pitch, and some form of sequence would best fit this framework” (Davis, 150).
- D. Though there are cases of similarity (and parallels) between the series, yet distinctions must be noted. For instance, both the 4th trumpet and 4th bowl affect the sun (but in the former case there is a darkening of the sun while in the latter an intensifying of it [8:12 and 16:8]). The 2nd trumpet destroys one-third of the seas, while the second bowl turns all the seas into blood (Rev 8:8-9; 16:3).
- E. There are several factors that support a general sequential arrangement:
 1. The theological issue of judgement related to repentance (see Session 3) argues for a general sequential arrangement.
 2. Rev 8:1-2 seems to imply that there is at least a general sequential arrangement of the trumpets to the seals.
 3. The seven bowls are called the seven last plagues (15:1), “because in them the wrath of God is finished.”
 4. Furthermore, at the 7th bowl, there is the exclamation “it is done” (16:17).
 5. The sequential view is further strengthened by comparing the sealing of the 144,000 on their foreheads (after the 6th seal – Rev 7:1-8) with the 5th trumpet that brings a plague on all but those who have been sealed. Hence, at least in the case of the 5th trumpet, it follows the 6th seal (rather than chronologically paralleling the 5th seal).
 6. Although there are parallels between the trumpets and bowls, the seals generally differ in content from the other two series. Furthermore, there is no alignment between the first, fifth, and seventh judgements of the septets.
 7. The entire series of bowl judgements seems to be contained in the 7th trumpet, as signalled by 10:7, “but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets” (compare 15:1,8; 16:17).

III. RELATION TO DANIEL'S 70TH WEEK AND THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

- A. The idea of a "Seven year period of tribulation" does not come from Revelation but from the Book of Daniel (see Dan 9:27).
- B. Daniel's focus is not on a sequence of divine judgements, but rather on the activity and end of the Antichrist (Dan 7; Dan 9; Dan 11).

- C. Highlights of Daniel's 70th Week (see chart on "Daniel's 70th Week" – *Suppl. 4.1*)
- D. Relation of the Seals to Daniel's 70th Week
1. Question: When do the seal judgements begin? Do they begin in the first half of Daniel's 70th Week or in the latter half?
 2. Clues:
 - a. Rev 6:17 - "the great day of their wrath has come"
This would certainly be the same as the divine wrath that was anticipated in "the day of the Lord." Thus, the "day of the Lord" has certainly commenced with the seals.
 - b. 2 Thess 2:1-4 - The "day of the Lord" does not come until after the "apostasy" and revealing of the Antichrist (and his abomination of the Temple). This is probably connected with the "abomination of desolation" mentioned by Jesus (Mt 24:15), which would mark the mid-point of Daniel's 70th Week (recall Dan 9:27 in which the Antichrist breaks the covenant at the middle of the last Week).
 3. Conclusion: The seal judgements begin in the 2nd half of the "week"¹

Some of the details in Rev 6 seem to hint that the seal judgements are *early* in the final 3 1/2 years. Rev 6:10-11 suggests that the martyrdom was just getting under way and was incomplete at this point. Rev 6:17 suggests that the "Day of the Lord" was just beginning.

Someone might object that this line of reasoning only establishes that the 6th seal occurs in the latter half of Daniel's 70th Week (leaving open the question about the first five seal judgements). However, Rev 7:14 clearly established that the martyred saints from the 5th seal (Rev 6:9-11) are clearly in the Tribulation. Hence, the 5th seal also occurs in the latter half of Daniel's 70th Week. But what about the first four seals? Although we may not be able to *prove* that they are in the latter half, there is probably good reason to believe that they are. Because they are divine judgements, most likely they are part of the "Day of the Lord" (note how destructive the 4th seal is!). Furthermore, the comment in 6:17 is probably not just a response to the 6th seal alone, but the reaction of the ungodly to all the seal judgements.

IV. OVERVIEW OF THE SEAL JUDGMENTS

- A. See chart: "The Seal Judgements" (*Suppl. 4.2*)
- B. Observations:
1. The Seals fall into two main groups:
 - a. The first four have the common factor of being introduced by the "four living beings" and associated with a rider on a horse.
 - b. The last two give us a contrast between two people groups and how they

¹Dr. Walvoord concurs with this conclusion: ". . . there are good reasons for concluding that these great events are compacted in the last three and one-half years before Christ's return to earth" ("Revelation," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 947).

respond to this time of wrath.

2. The four horses are related to the visions of Zechariah (1:7-17; 6:1-8)

The Zechariah passages have a similar symbolism, but involve different scenes. The red-horsed rider in Zech 1:8,11 is identified as the "Angel of the LORD," whereas Zech 6:5 with the words "these are the four spirits of heaven." In the case of Zechariah, they seem to be agents of God's will. They also have responsibility to help exercise God's wrath (Zech 6:8).

3. Notice how the seal judgements are introduced in Rev 6:1
 - a. "Thunder" - signals a coming storm
 - b. "Come" - Some people prefer to take the Greek word ἔρχου as meaning "go forth."

But observe: The word is used 11 times in the NT, and consistently means "come" in all other cases. Note Rev 22:17,20 where it means "come." In Mt 8:9, ἔρχου clearly means "come," as the expression "go!" is πορεύθητι.

- C. Chapter six presents the first six seal judgements that are contained in the scroll. The judgements are quite broad in their scope, and seem designed to awaken a misguided world that God is encountering her in judgement. Despite the severity of the judgements, the response (6:16-17) is inadequate.

V. THE SIX SEAL JUDGMENTS ANALYZED

Note: One's understanding of the six seal judgements and their chronological placement in Daniel's 70th Week may be influenced by the correlation one sees with the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24). However, there is diversity of opinion regarding where the *signs* of Mt 24 occur in relation to Daniel's 70th Week.²

A. 1st Seal (vv 1-2)

Numerous views have been put forth as to the identity of the first rider on the white horse.³ I will list four of these:

1. *The first rider is Christ himself as He begins His conquest.*
 - a. In Christ's appearance at the end of the Tribulation, He is riding on a white horse (19:11).

²“Pentecost and Gaebelien hold to the position that Matthew 24:4-8 describes the first half of the tribulation and that 24:9-26 refers to the second half of the tribulation with verses 27-31 relating to the second coming (John A. McLean, “The Chronological and Sequential Structure of Revelation” [Chattanooga, TN: Pretribulation Study Group, Dec 12-14, 1994], 24). Walvoord, on the other hand, takes the opening section up to 24:14 as marking the progress of the age (with growing intensity), and vv 15ff. as reflective of the Great Tribulation (John Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End,” *BibSac* 128 [Jul-Sep, 1971]: 209). Toussaint sees vv 7-14 as *general* characteristics of the tribulation, and vv 15ff. as a *specific* sign of the tribulation (Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* [Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980]: 271-73). Finally, Ryrie and McLean take Mt 24:4-14 as referring to the first half of the tribulation and 24:15-26 as referring to the second half (Charles Ryrie, *Revelation* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1968]: 48; McLean, 25).

³Robert L. Thomas lists nine views in his commentary (pp 419-24). For an excellent survey and analysis of the views, see Daniel K. K. Wong, “The First Horseman of Revelation 6,” *BibSac* 153:610 (Apr-Jun 1996): 212-26.

- b. The color *white* is frequently associated with the godly (or heavenly and holy) in Revelation (1:14; 2:17; 3:4-5,18; 4:4; 7:9,13-14; 20:11). [note, however, in this case that the color of the horse is probably due to its association with the symbolism in Zechariah 1:8-12 and 6:1-8; in Zechariah, these were divine instruments of judgement and one was the Angel of the Lord].
- c. The imagery may have literary connections with Ps 45 (esp. vs. 4), a Messianic psalm involving a sword and bow.
- d. Irenaeus, a disciple of John, interpreted the rider as Christ (ca. AD 202). He wrote, "For to this end was the Lord born . . . of whom also John says in the Apocalypse: 'He went forth conquering, that he should conquer.'"⁴
- e. The rider is given a crown, and in Rev 14:14 we see "one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head."

2. *The first rider represents the victorious proclamation of the gospel.*

So Ladd and Swete (see Wong, 220-221 for details and refutation).

3. *The first rider is the Antichrist in his attempt to conquer the world*

So Walvoord and Wong (but Wong would allow for a movement of which the Antichrist would be a chief example, particularly if Rev 6:1-2 is meant to parallel Mt 24:4-5).

- a. The other horses in the first four seal judgements are associated with judgement and destruction (and are non-divine instruments).
- b. It would be awkward that the Lamb who opens the seal would Himself be one of the riders.
- c. The Antichrist is portrayed as a conqueror (e.g., Rev 13:4-7; cf. 11:7; 17:9-13; Dan 7:8). [The verb *νικάω* (conquer, overcome) is used of the Beast in 11:7 and 13:7; but it is used of the Lamb in 17:14].
- d. The word for crown in Rev 6:2 (*στεφάνος*) differs from the word for crown in Rev 19:12 (*diadem* - a sovereign's crown). [Note, however, that Jesus was given a *στεφάνος* at His trial in mockery; also, "son of man" in 14:14 wears a *στεφάνος*.]
- e. In Rev 19:15, he is armed with a "sharp sword" (fig.), but in 6:2 with a bow.⁵
- f. The fact that the crown "was given to him" may be significant, for (as Wong points out, p 224) this expression in Rev "normally speaks of divine

⁴ Against Heresies 4.21.3, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 13 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:493.

⁵Zane Hodges has noted that both instruments are utilized in the Messianic Psalm 45. He explains the use of both in Revelation:

"For the bow is the weapon of long range warfare, whereas the sword is the weapon used in close combat with the enemy. If the rider of 6:2 represents Christ as the Initiator of all God's judgements upon His enemies, it is clear that throughout the tribulation, He fights with them, so to speak, at long range. For the judgements of the tribulation are such as fall from heaven to earth while the King is absent. But in ch. 19, the King comes personally to earth and now the conflict with the forces of evil is waged at close quarters and, with the sword, the last battle is won" ("The First Horseman of the Apocalypse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 [1962]: 333).

Wong, however, points out the difficulties that such a harmonization involves: "The weakness of this solution is its failure to note that the second rider in Revelation 6 carries a sword (vv. 3-4) and that if one treats the first rider as judging from heaven in bodily absence, the rest of the riders in chapter 6 would need to be considered the same way" (217).

permission given to the Antichrist (13:5,7,14-15), or evil powers (6:4,8; 9:1,3,5) to carry out their wicked mission.”

4. Thomas's View: similar to #3, but broader. He sees the first rider as a movement or force . . . counterfeit Christian forces of the future that attain world-wide dominion (p 424).

B. 2nd Seal (vv 3-4)

Walvoord sees this rider as the Antichrist, the world ruler (he also took the first rider as the world ruler). In the symbolism of Zechariah, however, the agents are associated with angels who have responsibility for carrying out God's wrath. This could look at the broader picture of nations and confederacies in conflict and warfare. The color red is connected to slaughter (2 Kgs 3:22-23).

C. 3rd Seal (vv 5-6)

A Roman denarius was a silver coin which was the normal wage for a worker for a day. Hence, this judgement looks at food shortage (which often follows war). The wheat was more precious, and hence the barley was a "poor man's food." The oil, by the way, is not petroleum, but olive oil in this context (compare the curse motif in Deut 28:38-40).

D. 4th Seal (vv 7-8)

This seal seems to view the aftermath of war. Regarding the sword, pestilence and famine as a means of God's judgement, see Jer 14:12; 24:10; and 42:17.

E. 5th Seal - The Martyred Saints (vv 9-11)

1. In the first four seals, there was nothing explicit about persecution of believers.
2. Problem for some who hold the Mid-trib view of the *rapture*: if the believers are raptured at the middle of the week (just before the seals), where do these saints come from so quickly in order to be martyred? [Note: not all Mid-trib advocates put the seals in the second half of Daniel's 70th week. Some put seals in 1st half.]
3. This group does not represent all the martyrs throughout church history. Note the contrast in which the persecutors are *still* dwelling on the earth:
v 9 - "those who had been slain" v 10 - "those who dwell on the earth"
4. Reasons for their martyrdom:
 - a. the Word of God
 - b. the testimony which they had maintained (compare 1:9 and the "overcoming" theme)
5. "underneath the altar" - See Ex 29:12; Lev 4:7. Part of the consecration service for priests involved pouring out the blood of a bull sacrifice at the base of the altar.
6. "white robes" - they are waiting for revenge, but *rewarded* for their faithfulness!
7. Notice carefully their *response*:
"O Lord, holy and true" = ὁ δεσποτης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός

Not κυριος but "sovereign Lord" which implies ownership. We acknowledge that we belong to You; hence, it is Your right to use our lives as You desire.

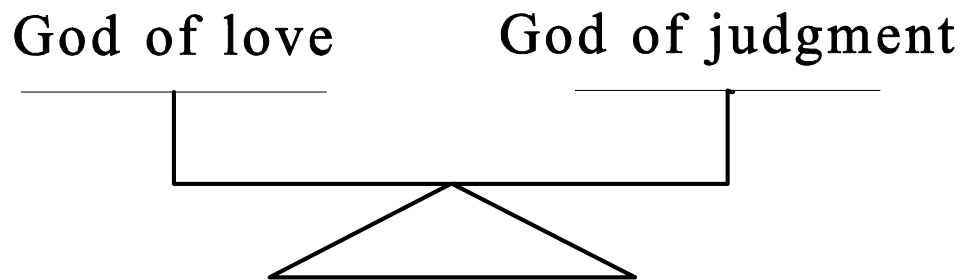
F. 6th Seal - Fear of the Ungodly (vv 12-17)

1. Earthquake and cosmic disturbances (12-14)
2. Response of the ungodly (15-17) *Contrast with above!!*

- a. Fear
- b. Awareness of divine origin
- c. Want to hide (cf. Isa 2:19,21; Hos 10:8)

Lessons for Our Life

- A. Note 6:9 - God's Word is often met by opposition from the world.
- B. Notice the reference to "the wrath of the Lamb" in 6:16. This seems paradoxical, after He had given His own blood for the sins of everyone. But to refuse grace leaves only wrath!



VI. THE INTERLUDE AFTER THE SIX SEALS (Rev 7:1–8:1)

Before the 7th seal is broken, the narration is interrupted to introduce us to the saved of the tribulation. Two groups are introduced: the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel and the "great multitude" who come out of the great tribulation (7:9,14). They are introduced here because of the contrast that is formed with the reaction of those whose hearts are hardened by the seal judgements in chapter 6. Regarding chapter seven, Mounce writes,

It contrasts the security and blessedness which await the faithful with the panic of a pagan world fleeing from judgement. In a sense it answers the question just posed, "Who is able to stand?"⁶

Furthermore, the delay in revealing the 7th seal heightens the suspense of what still awaits the world.

This interlude is a characteristic literary device used by the author—not all the material is a chronological advancement. McLean explains,

“The writer intermittently suspends the progressive movement and disclosure of the septets in order to introduce pertinent information. The information is inserted by means of narrative previews or narrative synopses. Narrative previews prophetically amplify major characters or events that are enunciated later in the Apocalypse. Narrative synopses provide apocalyptic scenes that review past events and lead the reader to future episodes.”⁷

A. INTERLUDE: THE SAVED OF THE TRIBULATION (7:1-17)

In Rev 6:16-17, the fierce wrath of God had caused the ungodly of the world to fear. But this wrath is not uncontrolled, nor does it represent a god who is "ticked off" at the whole human race. Rather, it is a very deliberate wrath designed to evoke repentance in man, while at the same time revealing

⁶Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 164.

⁷McLean, 4.

God's displeasure with a world led astray by the arch-enemy, Satan. This wrath does allow for some to stand, however. The God of heaven whose wrath is displayed does not hate humanity. On the contrary, he is very endeared to those who have found refuge in Him.

1. The Delay of the 7th Seal (7:1-3)

The first three verses give us the setting for the remainder of the chapter. Following the sixth seal, the flow of judgements is interrupted. The 7th seal is held back to allow for God's special provision for the 144,000. The idea of harming "the earth and the sea" look forward to the first four trumpets of 8:6-12 which involved the judgements on the earth's ecology and the cosmic disturbances. Whatever the "sealing" is, it must have some relation to the "harm" that is coming (7:3).

What is involved in the "sealing"? The OT background may be Ezek 9:4-7 where a divine messenger is sent throughout apostate Jerusalem, with the result that the sealed are spared the divine slaughtering of the rebellious inhabitants of the city. Furthermore, the sealing represents ownership and the object of one's allegiance (cf. 14:1). This is obviously a contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast. By the seal, they are protected from the torment of the locusts as well (9:4). A. Johnson believes they are not necessarily protected from persecution and martyrdom (479; so Thomas).

2. The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:4-8)

a. Three Main Views for the 144,000 [see "d" below for analysis]

- (1) Literal view - These are Jewish believers who are set aside for a special purpose during the Great Tribulation
 - (a) they are protected from destruction (so Walvoord, Seiss)
 - (b) they are martyred (so Thomas)
- (2) Literal Remnant view - A Jewish remnant, divinely preserved through the tribulation, who are converted at the end of the tribulation as they see their Messiah descending to the earth (R. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 81).
- (3) Symbolic view - This is a figurative representation of the completed church composed of Jew and Gentile; John uses the language of the new Israel (Beckwith, Caird, Swete, A. Johnson).

b. Observations

- (1) They are redeemed people (14:3-4).
- (2) There is a peculiar "12" pattern in the book (cf. 21:16-17; 22:2).
- (3) It is doubtful they are a symbolic representation, because of the way they are described in 14:4-5. They seem to be a unique group ("first fruits").
- (4) Notice the careful enumeration of the tribes — probably to be understood literally.

c. Twelve Tribes

- (1) Several biblical lists: Gen 29:30; Gen 49; Ex 1; Num 2; Ezek 48; Deut 33
- (2) Sometimes Joseph's two sons are included: Ephraim and Manasseh in place of Joseph. [Gen 48:5 – Jacob claimed them as his own, with Ephraim the younger being given the birthright]. In Rev 7, Joseph is listed with his son Manasseh, and Ephraim is not included.

- (3) Levi omitted in the Tabernacle ordering because of their unique priestly role. But in Rev 7, Levi is included.
- (4) Dan is not listed.
The tribe of Dan had a strong association with idolatry (1 Kgs 12:28-30; Jud 18:18-19, 30-31), although they do appear in the eschatological period in Ezek 48:2. Some have connected Dan with the Antichrist (though Dan 9:26-27 indicates that the Antichrist will emerge from the old Roman Empire).⁸ Dan is cast in a bad light in Gen 49:16-17. Two early church fathers connected Dan with the Antichrist: (1) Irenaeus (V.30,32) and (2) Hippolytus (*de Antichr.* 5,6).⁹ Yet we must always be careful about arguments from silence.
- d. Analysis of the Main Views of the 144,000
- (1) Literal Remnant View
Gundry feels that ch. 14 is a millennial scene and interprets everything in light of this. They will be saved, then, but are not saved during the tribulation. Weak case!
- (2) Symbolic View
Alan Johnson observes the play on the number 12, which he would regard as symbolic of completeness and perfection. Hence, he concludes that this represents all or the total number of God's servants. Ladd points out that since the list is irregular, John did not mean for it to represent literal Israel. The symbolic view of the 144,000, however, is exegetically weak and is a forced attempt to read into this "the Church." The number 144,000 is unlikely to represent an "indefinite number" because we have in contrast to the 144,000 the "great multitude" (the latter is clearly intended to represent an indefinite number).
- (3) Literal View - Jewish believers in the Tribulation
This view is best as more in keeping with a literal hermeneutic. Israel in the NT always has in view the physical descendants (even Gal 6:16). First fruits may be connected with "all Israel's" salvation in Rom 11:25-29. That the 144,000 do not represent the Church is evident from the fact that (1) the 1st group is numbered, whereas the 2nd is innumerable and (2) the 1st is limited to Jews, whereas the 2nd is from every nation (see, however the response by A. Johnson, 484-85).

Robert Thomas notes, "As God reserved 7,000 in the days of Ahab (1 Kings 19:18; Rom 11:4), He will reserve 144,000 for Himself during the future Great Tribulation" (474).

Note: If the 144,000 do represent Jewish believers in the Tribulation, we should keep in mind that the vast majority of Jews in the Tribulation will not be "saved." Apparently, most of them will even perish during this terrible time (cf. Zech 13:8).

⁸ A possible (though not certain) support for the idea that the Antichrist will be Jewish could come from Dan 11:37 (if אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָיו is translated "the God of his fathers" rather than "the gods of his fathers.")

⁹ Irenaeus cites Jer 8:16 in support of the idea that the Antichrist comes from the tribe of Dan. He then states, "This, too, is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse along with those which are saved" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, V.30.2, p 559).

3. The Service of the Great Multitude (7:9-17)

a. Crucial Questions

- a. Are they the Gentiles who are saved in the tribulation in contrast to the Jews in 1-8?
- b. Are they martyrs who have given their lives in the Great Tribulation and have been slain by the beast?

These could be future martyrs referred to in the fifth seal (6:11).

b. Observations

- (1) They are before the throne (v 9).
- (2) They are in "His temple" (v 15).
The New Jerusalem has no temple (21:22), but notice vv. 15-17 which parallels ch. 21 & 22.
- (3) "palm branches" - connected with the Feast of Tabernacles.
Edersheim (*The Temple*, 269) notes that this feast is a reminder of the wilderness, but also it pointed to the final harvest when Israel's mission should be completed, and all nations are gathered to the Lord. The feasts of Lev 23 typified events to come. The tabernacle looks to the millennium (note Zech 14 as well as Peter's statement in Matt 17:4).
- (4) They are described as "those who come out of the Great Tribulation" (7:14).
- (5) The wearing of white robes (7:9) probably looks at their faithful allegiance to Christ. Hence, they are an example to the 7 churches and to us! [vs. 14 connects with 3:4, where soiled garments represent defection from Christ.]

B. The Seventh Seal (8:1)

The silence in heaven is striking! Normally, the scene is very noisy with the praise of many voices and the sounding of instruments. This reflects the expectation of a verdict. What is to come must be awesome, as the first cycle of judgements did not result in widespread repentance. Furthermore, the praise of heaven is interrupted to allow the prayers of the suffering saints on earth to be heard.

Lessons for Our Life

We will not be idle. Note vs. 15 - "they serve Him day and night."