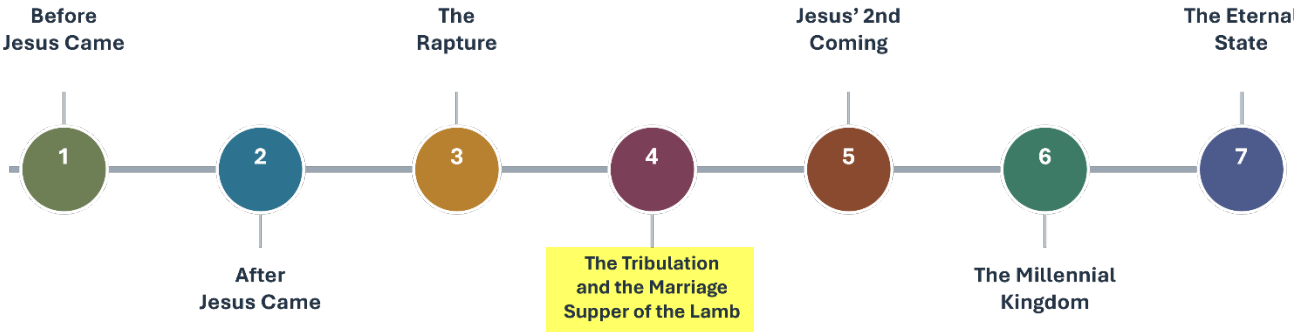
4. DEATH DURING THE TRIBULATION (Above and below the line)

We are now transitioning to a different period. This is the timeframe immediately following the rapture when those who are saved will then be above, and for those who are not saved, in the tribulation below. And we'll get through this in one study (I think 😊).



The piece we are going to deal with here is what happens to those who had **not** put their faith in Jesus before the rapture, but do so during the tribulation. Because there is not one follower of Jesus who will be here the second after the rapture occurs. You might then be asking yourself why this matters now that we have established as followers of Jesus, we will not be here during the tribulation, but rather in heaven with God. Well, I can think of at least four reasons this is relevant, besides the Bible telling us about it (which clearly makes it relevant in and of itself).

1. Many of us have individuals we love who have not yet given their lives to Jesus. And one prayer I often hear is for the rapture to wait until they do so. The reality is God has already told us He appoints the time and location each one of us is born into that we might search for and find Him (Acts 17:26–27). Meaning if we truly are the generation in which the rapture occurs (and I believe we are [1 Cor. 15:51–52]), then our loved ones who are in rebellion to God have been placed in such a time that they might actually end up in the tribulation. Some think that is bad news, but truthfully, when so many other generations have quietly slipped into hell through rejection of Jesus up to their death, God has chosen to bring some into the tribulation period because He knew this would be the greatest chance they had to come into salvation.
2. This brings up the next point, which is the tribulation is also an act of God's grace. Now it does not negate God's wrath (which is entirely justified, yet which we have been set free from through Jesus enduring that wrath for us). But God could have just ordained that once He took the church out of the world, He would forgo the tribulation and simply bring His final judgment. Yet there will be many who come to faith in Jesus during those seven years because of the affliction they endure then (Psa. 119:67, Prov. 23:13–14 [God is the Father—Mal. 2:10]). Therefore, it is a time of both wrath and then of grace for those who choose to turn to Him then. **So in this way, this is a very real message of hope**.
3. The third reason is for those who are interested in this topic but have not yet turned to Jesus while there is still time (2 Cor. 6:2). It's true many will come to salvation during the tribulation, but it will be the closest thing to hell the earth has ever experienced. And the Bible makes it clear many who come to Jesus then will be *beheaded* for doing so (Rev. 20:4). Another issue is people will just be rapidly dying in general during the tribulation (read Rev. 6–19 to get a feel for this). If this is your backup plan, it's a poor one.
4. And the final reason I will list here is this issue affects the rapture debate. If there are tribulation saints (which we will see specifically named today), why would they be differentiated from the rest of the saints (the church) if we were still here? And if this logic holds true, it is then noteworthy that the verses (6:11, 7:13–14) which speak of the tribulation saints appear in the first half of the tribulation (with Ch. 11–13 signifying the transition to the second half), indicating once again a pretribulation rapture.

This section is also relevant to our study of heaven because it still addresses 1) where those who come to salvation during the tribulation will be, 2) the state of their souls, and 3) in what form.

- Rev. 6:9–11 and 7:9–17 give us the main pictures of what will be happening to those who come to Jesus during the tribulation and then die. So we will be digging into these today.
- And Rev. 20:5 tells us the fate of those who die during the tribulation without receiving Jesus. They (along with everyone who has ever rejected God) will be going to the great white throne judgment (20:11–15).
- Now again this is not a comprehensive study on the book of Revelation, so we are going to bounce around to get the pieces relevant to our topic.

First, we come to Rev. 6:9–11 where we arrive at the fifth seal being opened, and it's a little different scene. *[9]When He* (Jesus) *opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. [10] And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.*

Now the text clearly tells us these individuals are what we refer to as martyrs today, although the word "*martyr*" really means **witness**.

- The thing is, during the tribulation, anyone who carries the witness of the word of God, and how they received the free gift of salvation through receiving Jesus, is likely to be killed as these will be!
- We see this same hostility in the way the world deals with **the two witnesses** (who I again believe are Moses and Elijah [see Matt. 17:1–3]), when they are allowed by God to be physically killed after witnessing for 3½ years. And the people rejoice because they don't have to hear the testimony of Jesus from them anymore (Rev. 11:7–12). Although, as we find in 14:6–12, they're still going to hear it; it will just be angels bringing the message. 😊
- And if you were to jump ahead to 12:11, you would hear that those who overcome Satan in this time will do so "*…by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*" Meaning they would not renounce or deny the first two (Jesus and their salvation testimony), for the preservation of the last (their lives).

As mentioned, so many who come to Jesus during the tribulation will be killed for doing so. But by the time you get to 14:13, you will hear an angel saying, "*Blessed* (happy) *are the dead who die in the Lord from now on….*"

- Truly, they will be blessed, because the earth is no place to be during the tribulation. And since they have now come to salvation, and therefore eternal life with God, it's best for them to be out of there.
- And I believe the reason we see them described as *under the altar* is because the altar is where sacrifice and offering was made to God.
- Once they come to the understanding of what God had done to redeem them, they will willingly offer their lives to the One who saved them from their self-induced damnation. Which should be the position of everyone who has received the free gift of God's grace.

Is it your position or do you believe your life is still your own possession (Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 6:19–20)?

(cont. next page)

If we then view **the 4th horse and horseman** in Rev. 6:7–8, where it tells us, "*...him who sat on it* (the pale horse) *was death, and hades followed him,*" we discover those who did not receive Jesus during these first four judgments, and then died, were immediately ushered into *hades*, which simply means "*the place of the dead.*"

- This is not yet hell, for that is the lake of fire, which is the destination after the great white throne judgment at the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ (found in Rev. 19:19–20:15).
- But since Jesus emptied out the side of *hades* called *paradise*, and ushered its inhabitants into heaven, those who go to *hades* during the tribulation are entering the side called *torment*, and are simply awaiting the great white throne judgment, where all who have rejected Jesus will be condemned forever.
- The reason I bring this back up is that this group we are looking at in 6:9 is not going in that direction. They are under the altar of sacrifice **in heaven**. For just as we are told in 2 Cor. 5:8, for the believer, when this body we are in now dies, the soul is immediately present with the Lord. Just as these believers are shown to be here.

There is a great truth everyone needs to be aware of (which is certainly not new to many here). That is, **those who are born once will die twice, and those who are born twice will die once** (let's unpack that).

- We are all born physically into this world, 1) and if that's as far as you go, then not only will your body die and your soul then go to *the place of the dead*, but as we get to Rev. 20:14–15, which is after the great white throne judgment, we hear, "*Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*" This is speaking of eternal hell (Matt. 25:41 & 46). Anyone who goes to this place by willfully rejecting what God has done for you in sending His only begotten Son will never come out again (John 3:36, 8:24, 12:48, Rom. 2:5).
- But 2) for those who have been born into this world (which the Bible tells us is to be born into sin [Rom. 5:12]), and then go on to receive Jesus' cleansing blood, to be born again (John 3:1–7) (which is **the second birth**), when our body dies it will be the last part of us that **ever** dies (one death)! And it too will then be resurrected eternally.
- For as Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:4, then our "*...mortality may be swallowed up by life.*" (See also 1 John 5:13, John 5:24.)

But for the time being (in this future scene), **the *souls*** of those who come to Jesus during the tribulation and then die, wait under the altar, but not their bodies. Listen to what Rev. 20:4–6 tells us about them: "*Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast* (antichrist) *or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands* (so this cannot be OT saints—these are tribulation saints). *And they lived* (bodily resurrection) *and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead* (those who did not receive Jesus) *did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*"

- Those who die after having put their faith in Jesus will not be raised bodily until the end of the tribulation (20:4). And those who reject Jesus will also be raised bodily before entering into the great white throne judgment and then into hell.
- You see, both will be raised bodily (Dan. 12:2, John 5:28–29, Acts 24:15, Rev. 20:12–15). But one party will be united with God in His physical presence forever, while the other will be separated from His people and all that is good, forever.
- So what are these tribulation saints waiting for here? For the rest of the tribulation martyrs/witnesses to come in. Which will not be completed until the end of the tribulation.

Now we jump to Rev. 7:9–14 to get more details (we will take this in two segments).

7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Some groups have been led to believe there will be no salvation during the tribulation, but this passage and verse 14, which tells us, "*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation,*" make that claim foolish.

- As hard as the tribulation will be, there are going to be so many that come to Jesus, it will be impossible to number them (see also Matt. 24:14).

But on another positive note, not only will there be a mass multitude that do come to salvation, we find they are *of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues*. And from the point of their entrance into the presence of the Lord, where we will be also, we understand we will be living in **real peace** and **unity**.

- These are the two things so many desire upon this earth but can never experience in our current situation. Yet for those who belong to Jesus, we will see all the diversity God has created in heaven, with perfect unity and peace under the headship of our God.

We find this group is in heaven, for they are *standing before the throne and before the Lamb* (8:3 tells us the altar is in front of the throne of God), proclaiming with all their heart, another "*doxology*" (words or songs of praise as we learned about in 4:8).

> Folks, don't lose heart as you see things getting worse in the world. We are not home yet. And our home really is paradise. Do what you can, as much as it depends on you, to live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18). But know that now it's not possible to be at peace with everyone here. Yet there is coming a day when perfect peace will be a perpetual reality.

- As for the *palm branches*, in John's time palm branches being waved was customary when there was a great victory. And unlike when the people waved the branches on Palm Sunday, believing Jesus would defeat the Romans, not understanding who He was and that what He was about to do was so much greater than they could imagine, this group in heaven is now celebrating this victory of our Great King. **This is a celebration of all that God had done to conquer sin and death, greatly reversing the effects of the curse before heading into the millennial kingdom.**

7:11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

I think what we see happening here is John is so taken by the scene that he fails to ask the question that needed to be asked. So this elder asks John in order to kind of prime the conversation. And John wisely hands the question back, as it appears he's not completely sure.

- The elder then answers they are the tribulation saints. Those who 1) went into the tribulation without Jesus, 2) but came to salvation during the tribulation, 3) and then when martyred, immediately found themselves in heaven before God and all the other worshippers (not in purgatory or some state of soul sleep).

- But what you might not immediately see here is when it says they came out of the great tribulation, **the verb is in the present perfect tense**. So it appears as John was watching the scene, more and more kept coming in!

Now I don't know about you, but I can understand how powerfully that would have affected John to watch as the number of people the Lord had created for Himself were saved and just kept coming into heaven.

- When I have been privileged enough to witness even one person give their life to Jesus, it overwhelms me with joy and wonder.
- And John has been watching multitudes in rebellion die up to this point. And he too surely needed some encouragement. Well, he got it!!!

So what should be the takeaway for us who are worried about some of our unbelieving loved ones? Well, you can hold out **hope** for them because God loves them more than you do or can. None of us knows who will be going into the tribulation for sure (unless God has privately told you). But we can see God has a perfect and timeless plan which He designed to give each person ever born the best opportunity they could have to come to salvation.

- The more we read of the Bible (even just in this study of heaven), the more we understand these are not simply random pieces of incongruent information, trying to take us to some illogical belief. But rather the details of a perfectly crafted master plan of God for our rescue, rebirth, and reunification to Him forever.
- And since we have seen here those who come to Jesus during the tribulation do so with full conviction, knowing they will likely die for doing so, we can both see 1) they are not going to be casual believers, 2) and they too will be ruling and reigning with Jesus in the millennial kingdom (meaning they too will be in their glorified bodies then, to never die again).
- This gives us then two responsibilities when it comes to our lost loved ones now: 1) keep living out and declaring your life in Jesus before them so when you are gone, they know where you have gone. And 2) live out and cling to the words of 1 Cor. 13:7 which tells us **love**, "*bears all things, believes all things, **hopes** all things, and endures all things.*" The enemy wants us to believe 1) we cannot *bear* certain things, 2) we should not *believe* in every word of God, 3) we should lose *hope*, 4) and think that the patient *endur*ance God has said we are to have (Rom. 5:3–4, Heb. 10:36, James 1:12) does not apply to everything. Don't believe anything he says. But do believe everything God has said and apportioned to your faith in Him.

CROSS REFERENCES

Act 17:26–27 NKJV – (26) "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, (27) "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

1Co 15:51–52 NKJV – (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- (52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Psa 119:67 NKJV – Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.

Pro 23:13–14 NKJV – (13) Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. (14) You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell.

Mal 2:10 NKJV – Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another By profaning the covenant of the fathers?

2Co 6:2 NKJV – For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Rev 20:4 NKJV – And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Rev 6:11 NKJV – Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Rev 7:13–14 NKJV – (13) Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Rev 20:5 NKJV – But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Rev 20:11–15 NKJV – (11) Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. (12) And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. (14) Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Mat 17:1–3 NKJV – (1) Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; (2) and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. (3) And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Rev 11:7–12 NKJV – (7) When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. (8) And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. (9) Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. (10) And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. (11) Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. (12) And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.

Act 20:28 NKJV – "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

1Co 6:19–20 NKJV – (19) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (20) For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Rev 6:7–8 NKJV – (7) When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." (8) So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

2Co 5:8 NKJV – We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Mat 25:41 NKJV – "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

Mat 25:46 NKJV – "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Jhn 3:36 NKJV – "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Jhn 8:24 NKJV – "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

Jhn 12:48 NKJV – "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

Rom 2:5 NKJV – But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Rom 5:12 NKJV – Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

2Co 5:4 NKJV – For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

1Jo 5:13 NKJV – These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Jhn 5:24 NKJV – "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Dan 12:2 NKJV – And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Jhn 5:28–29 NKJV – (28) "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice (29) "and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Act 24:15 NKJV – "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

Rev 20:12–15 NKJV – (12) And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. (14) Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Mat 24:14 NKJV – "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Rev 8:3 NKJV – Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Rev 4:8 NKJV – The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

Rom 12:18 NKJV – If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Rom 5:3–4 NKJV – (3) And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; (4) and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Heb 10:36 NKJV – For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

Jas 1:12 NKJV – Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.