

Will You Pass the Ordeal?

International Bible Lessons

Revelation 7:9-17

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“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands” (Revelation 7:9—NRSV).

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands” (Revelation 7:9—NASB-U).

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man 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” (Revelation 7:9—KJV).

When John saw the great multitude with palm branches in heaven, he may have remembered the cheering crowds on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem as the Messiah. Though he saw people from every tribe and tongue, he did not know who they were or why they enjoyed the honor of standing in the presence of God. Therefore, the angel told John that these people had come through the great tribulation or great ordeal (Revelation 7:14).

An ordeal can be a time of prolonged suffering or special testing. Going through an ordeal can prove that we have acquired practical knowledge in a subject or have mastered certain skills (often survival skills). Those who successfully pass through their ordeal often receive honors, recognition, and promotions that acknowledge their achievements. The white robes worn by the great multitude in heaven were signs of successful passage through the great ordeal.

For them to qualify to wear white robes, Jesus first had to die on the cross and shed His blood to provide them forgiveness and cleansing from sin. He also had to rise from the dead and ascend into heaven to the throne of God. Next, to pass successfully through the ordeal, believers need to wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb. The washing means receiving Jesus as the Messiah and His sacrificial death as a substitute for the punishment we deserve, to have Him cleanse us from all unrighteousness and empower us to love and live for God.

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