

The Multitude in Heaven
Revelation 7:9-17
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INTRODUCTION

1. We are looking again today at Revelation chapter 7 in what is commonly called the parenthesis that occurs before the opening of the 7th seal.
2. Last week we looked at verses 1-8 at the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists.
3. Today we're looking at *The Multitude in Heaven* which covers verses 9-17.
4. Read Revelation 7:9-17.
5. We have now entered into this portion of Scripture that identifies the saints in heaven.
6. The question that is asked "Who are these saints and where did they come from?"
7. That is the same question that one of the twenty-four elders asked John in verse 13.
8. Many notable scholars believe that this is referring to those who were saved during the tribulation period.
9. One thing we can definitely say where there is full agreement is "This great multitude in chapter 7 is clearly a different group from those described in chapter 6. The contrasting and additional truth is significant" (Marvin

- Rosenthal, *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*, p.183).
10. John Walvoord identifies this group as those who are “dead” – through martyrdom. “(The Revelation of Jesus Christ, p.139). “However, nowhere in the considerable description of this group (Rev.7:9-17) is it ever said they are martyred. In the previous chapter, a group of martyrs is seen. Their martyrdom occurred with the opening of the fifth seal, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. They are heard to be crying out to God that their blood be avenged on “them that dwell on the earth” (Rev.6:10). They are given white robes and told to “rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Rev.6:11). These martyrs are to be resurrected and given bodies on the first day of the Millennium (Rev.20:4)” (Rosenthal, p.183).
 11. So this cannot be the martyrs of the 5th seal.
 12. Who are they then?
 13. Let’s answer that by noticing 5 features about this multitude.

I. The Count of the Multitude (v.9a-d)

John first says, “After these things.” This introduces a new vision, distinct from the previous found in vv.1-8.

John has already told us what he has seen up to this point: A Door Open in Heaven (4:1-2a), A Throne Set in Heaven, (4:2b), The One who Sat on the Throne (4:2c-3a), A Rainbow Around the Throne (4:3b), Twenty-Four Thrones (4:4a), Twenty-Four Elders on Thrones (4:4b), Lightnings, Thunderings, and Voices (4:5a), Seven Lamps of Fire (4:5b), A Sea of Glass (4:6a), Four Living Creatures (4:6b-9), Worship (4:9-11), A Seven Sealed Scroll (5:1-5), A Lamb (5:6-7), Worship and Singing (5:8-14), The First Six Seals Opened by the Lamb (6:1-17), The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8), and now The Multitude in Heaven (7:9-17).

Robert Mounce says, “The second vision of chapter 7 stands in marked contrast to the first. Instead of 144,000 there appears a great multitude which no man can number” (The Book of Revelation, p.171).

The exclamation “Behold” reveals this vision “to be a shocking, startling one to John” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11).

A. It is Great (v.9a)

“A great multitude”

“Great” Gr.polus (plural), “much, many, large” (Strong), “of great crowds” (UBS), “numerous” (Friberg)

B. It Could Not Be Numbered (v.9b)

“Which no one could number”

“The number was so great that no one could count them, and John, therefore, did not attempt to do it” (Barnes).

“This is in marked and direct contrast to the immediately previous group who are said to number 144,000; therefore, this has to be a tremendously large number” (Rosenthal, p.183).

C. It Includes the Mass of Humanity (v.9c)

John says, “Of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.”

This describes “people from every culture, descent, race, and language (cf. 5:9). It depicts the mass of humanity, crossing all barriers and dividing lines” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11).

Robert Mounce says, “The great throng is pictured as standing before the throne and the Lamb. The elders, living creatures, and angels of chapters 4 and 5 are now joined with so vast a multitude of redeemed that to number them would be impossible. In every direction they stretch out as far as the eye can see. As God promised Abraham, they are in number as the stars of heaven (Gen.15:5) and the sand of the sea (Gen.32:12). The universality of the multitude is stressed by the fourfold division into nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” (The Book of Revelation, p.171).

D. It is Before the Throne (v.9d)

John says they are “standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

This marks another contrast to the martyred saints in Revelation 6:9. “The martyrs in Revelation 6 are souls under the altar asking God to avenge their blood (Rev.6:9-10). The great multitude in Revelation 7, in contrast, are before the throne proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb’” (Rev.7:10) (Marvin Rosenthal, *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*, p.184).

II. The Clothing of the Multitude (v.9e)

“Clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”

A. They Are Wearing White Robes

1. “White” (Leukos) “describes a dazzling, brilliant, shining white. In ancient times, such clothing was worn for festivals and celebrations” (MacArthur).
 - a) At Jesus’ transfiguration in Matthew 17 it says in verses 1-2 that “after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, brought them up on a high mountain by themselves, and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.”
 - b) Luke’s account reads that they “became white and glistening [shined or sparkled]” (Luke 9:29)

- c) In Matthew's account of the resurrection of Jesus, he tells about the angel who "came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow" (Mat.28:3-4).
- d) "White" symbolizes holiness and righteousness (Rev.3:4-5, 18)

Robert Mounce says, "Their robes of white symbolize not only the victory of faith but the righteousness of Christ. Verse 14 specifically says that the robes are white by virtue of being washed in the blood of the Lamb" (The Book of Revelation, p.171).

- 2. "Robes" (Stole) depicts "a long, full-length robe" (MacArthur) "which extended to the feet" (Thayer). This "long flowing garment or robe [was] worn as an upper or outer garment" (Friberg) and were therefore worn by "kings, priests, and persons of rank" (Strong).

It is said of the saints that are martyred in the 5th seal, they were "given to each of them a white robe" (6:11, NASB).

Mark 16:5 describes the angel who was at the tomb not only in a white robe but a "long white garment" such as depicted in Revelation 7:9.

B. They Have Palm Branches in their Hands

"Palm branches are associated in Scripture with celebration, deliverance, and joy. They were especially prominent during the Feast of Tabernacles"

(MacArthur) which “celebrated the victory of Israel's exodus from Egypt” (Craig Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary), as well as “commemorated God's faithfulness to them during their wanderings in the wilderness, when they were totally dependent on Him” (Keener).

“During Jesus' triumphal entry the joyous crowd waved palm branches as they welcomed Him into Jerusalem, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel" (John 12:13)” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11).

III. The Cry of the Multitude (v.10)

“And crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

A. The Scene in Heaven is Focused on this Multitude

1. In chapter 4 we hear the “four living creatures...saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’” (v.8).
2. In verses 10-11 we see “the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.’”
3. In chapter 5 verses 8-10 we hear “the twenty-four elders” as they “sang a new song.”

4. Verse 11 culminates as John hears “the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders.”
5. Up to this point all the praise and worship that is occurring is in heaven before the throne and now you hear in 13 “every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them” joining in. John says, he “heard [them] saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”
6. All of this praise occurs before the opening of the six seals but now that the six seals have been opened we enter this interlude where we hear a multitude “crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ (7:10).

B. At Once Join Hears Their Cry of Worship

What did they say? What will you say at this moment?

“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

1. True believers understand that salvation is all of God and not of themselves
2. They agree with Paul who said in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”
3. They know they were chosen “in Him before the

foundation of the world” (Eph.1:4) and do not seek to attribute to themselves any aspect of their salvation.

4. That’s why they cry out after being raptured, “Salvation belongs to our God!”

IV. The Company with the Multitude (vv.11-12)

A. The Angels, Twenty-Four Elders, and the Four Living Creatures Join the Multitude in Worship (vv.11-12)

1. They fall “on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.”
2. What did they say? “Amen!”
3. Read it without the pause:

The multitude: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (v.10).

The Angels, 24 Elders, Four Living Creatures answer: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

B. Worship is the Occupation of Heaven

1. It is seen throughout the book of Revelation
 - a) At least 2 others times we see the 24 elders worshipping
 - (1) Rev.11:16 - “And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their

thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God.”

- (2) Rev.19:4 - “And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!”
- b) John falls down to worship the angel who was revealing these things to him and he is told to get up
- (1) Rev.19:10 - “And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”
 - (2) Rev.22:8-9 - “Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

2. It is seen in Isaiah’s vision (Isa.6)

Erwin Lutzer accurately states: “How often Christians assume they have worshiped God simply because they have been in church! We are told that the church building is “God’s house” (an inaccurate designation

borrowed from the Old Testament temple) and conclude that worship must take place there! Not necessarily. God was not pleased with the worship at Jerusalem (the Holy City). Nor is he impressed with beautiful cathedrals.”

A.W. Tozer adds: “God wants worshipers before workers; indeed the only acceptable workers are those who have learned the lost art of worship. . . . The very stones would praise him if the need arose and a thousand legions of angels would leap to do his will.”

V. The Context of the Multitude (vv.13-17)

A. Who Are the Multitude that Suddenly Appears in Heaven? (vv.13-14)

1. This is precisely the question one of the twenty-four elders asked John:

“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’” (v.13)

2. John’s answer is revealing in verse 14

“And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’”

In other words, John does not have a clue.

3. This is why he is looking in amazement in verse 1 and says “behold”
4. In verse 14 The elder answers his own question by saying, “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.”

Marvin Rosenthal says, “ John wrote: ‘And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God’ (Rev.7:11). A host of different groups are present to greet this great multitude. This host does not include the church, which is conspicuous by its absence. It is reasonable to expect that the church would have been present if it already had been raptured pretribulationally” (The Prewrath Rapture of the Church, p.185).

Robert Van Kampen says, “The first four seals correspond to what will happen during the first half of the seventieth week – that is, during the ‘birth pangs’ of the Olivet Discourse. The fifth seal will occur during the second half of the seventieth week – that is, during the great tribulation by Antichrist. And the sixth seal corresponds to the sign of the day of the Lord – that is, the sign which will cut short the great tribulation, immediately preceding the rapture of the church and the beginning of God’s wrath on the ungodly. And then we see the arrival of the great multitude. Can there be any doubt in anyone’s mind on who this great multitude must be, especially in light of the clear teaching of Christ and Paul?...’These ones,” this great multitude, can only be the elect of God for whom Christ died who have just been raptured out of the great tribulation by Antichrist, after the sign of the end of the age is given at the sixth seal” (The Sign, p.295).

B. The Multitude is the Church that was Previously Raptured at the Close of the Sixth Seal

1. Remember the events of the sixth seal (6:12-17)
2. Remember what Jesus says about the seals in Matthew 24?

a) Seals 1-3 (Antichrist, Wars, Famine) are called “the beginning of birth pangs” (Mat.24:8)

- (1) Seal 1 (Antichrist) Rev.6:1-2 - rider on the white horse

Mat.24:4-5 says, “And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.’”

- (2) Seal 2 (War) Rev.6:3-4 - rider on the red horse

Mat.24:6 says, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.”

- (3) Seal 3 (Famine) Rev.6:5-6 - rider on the black horse

Mat.24:7 says, “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines,

pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.”

b) Seals 4-6 is the “great tribulation” spoken of in Mat.24:9 and is cut short according to Mat.24:22 due to the rapture.

(1) Seal 4 (Death) Rev.6:7-8 - rider on the pale horse

Mat.24:9 says, “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.”

(2) Seal 5 (Martyrdom) Rev.6:9-11 - souls of those under the altar who had been slain because of the Word of God...and the testimony which they held.

Mat.24:10-22 says, “And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 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. “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in

Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.”

(3) Seal 6 (Comic disturbances) Rev.6:12-17

Joel 2:30-31 says, “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.”

Mat.24:23-31 - “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. “Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is

in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

3. Notice what the elder further says regarding this multitude in heaven (vv.15-17)
 - a) “They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple” (v.15a).
 - b) “And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them” (v.15b).
 - c) “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat” (v.16).
 - d) “For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to

[fountains of living water - NASB]” (v.17a).

- e) “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (v.17b).

CONCLUSION

1. What a beautiful picture of what is yet awaiting for the church!
2. John MacArthur says, “In this age when Christianity is under siege on all sides, seemingly losing its grip on divine truth and apparently headed for defeat, it is comforting to be reassured of the ultimate triumph of God's saving grace. In the midst of an even worse situation in the future before Christ's return, God will redeem His people. That thought should bring present- day believers great comfort, and motivate all to praise God for the greatness of His redemptive plan” (Revelation 1-11).

3. Listen to these words as we close.

Jesus said in John 14:1-3 - "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

4. Are you one of these that is preparing a place for and will come again to receive to Himself?
5. Let's pray.