

UNITED IN PRAISE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 7:9-17
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 7:9-17
TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Revelation 7:9-17

I. Uncountable Crowd

Revelation 7:9-10

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

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

9a. We are given the impression this *great multitude* is far bigger than the large but countable number of those from Israel's tribes that John had just witnessed (Revelation 7:4-8). John's vision is similar to Daniel's vision of a throne room, where a crowd of “ten thousand times ten thousand” stands before the “Ancient of Days” (Daniel 7:9-10).

9b. The cumulative effect of this group is universally representative of all humanity. It includes people from *every nation*—sometimes translated “Gentiles” when referring to any nation that is not Israel.

A *people* is a group bound together by cultural identity. They would share many cultural markers that might transcend national or ethnic boundaries. One such marker may be their *language*. Languages

are not confined to regional or national boundaries; they cross borders and can transcend political identities.

9c. The previous description reflects the worldwide penetration of the gospel. The image of *wearing white robes* means that the person is cleansed from sin.

The message to the church in Sardis commended those who had not soiled their garments (with sin) but instead had walked with Christ in white, “for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4-5). Further, white robes are given as a reward to the martyrs of the church, those who have maintained their faith and witness unto death (6:9-11).

9d. Use of *palm branches* reflects a practice of worship that began with the Festival of Tabernacles. This annual observance celebrated Israel's liberation from Egypt and God's faithfulness to his people during a time of need.

In the New Testament, crowds waved palm branches while shouting “Hosanna” during Jesus' triumphal entry (John 12:13). The multitudes in John's vision stand in worship before the Lamb, who has indeed saved them.

10. The multitude acknowledges that their hope of *salvation* is realized. This implies God's victory over his enemies and deliverance for his people (Revelation 12:10; 19:1). It is not any fictitious

god that is being described, only *our God*. This also emphasizes the personal nature of God. His relationship with his people is fully demonstrated. The means of this deliverance is seen also in their worship of *the Lamb* (Revelation 5:13). Christ's death and resurrection as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) enacts God's salvation.

II. Worshipful Circle

Revelation 7:11-12

11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² **saying:**

“Amen!

**Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”**

11. The inner circle *around the throne* becomes the focus again. Their acts of worship involve their whole bodies. As they fall to their knees, their faces touch the ground, presumably in full view of the great multitude that worships by joyously waving palms.

12a. *Saying* could imply more than words merely spoken. As the words of worship from the inner circle are spoken in unison and have the structure of an ancient hymn, it is possible that these words were meant to be chanted or recited.

The worship described here is bracketed on both sides with *Amen*, a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “it is true.”

12b. The first word of pronouncement of those around the throne is justified because they have experienced the Lord's goodness. *Glory* carries the image of being full of light—radiant like celestial bodies (1 Corinthians 15:41). The glory of the

Lord sometimes accompanies heavenly manifestations (Luke 2:9). A characteristic of God's presence in the tabernacle or the temple was a display of his glory.

The Bible often places *wisdom* in parallel with knowledge. God has absolute knowledge. He has determined what is right and wrong. God always does the right thing, having never-failing wisdom.

When recognizing God's salvation, a response of giving *thanks* is appropriate. It is an expression of gratitude to God for his care and his provision. *Honor* offers esteem for a person, based on the person's character and acts. God is worthy of ultimate honor for his great providential works of salvation and simply because he is God.

The word *power* is tied to God's acts of creating and sustaining the universe. The all-powerful one who created the universe also provides deliverance for his people. Related to power, *strength* describes the characteristic of a very strong person. We can say that God's strength is inexhaustible and without limits.

12c. This hymn ends on an important note that calls for the seven ascriptions to be recognized *for ever and ever*. This acknowledges the eternal nature of *God*. Even our best descriptions of his nature fail to account for the eternity of God—the one without beginning or end.

12d. The repetition of *Amen* brings a solemn sense of affirmation to these words of worship.

III. White-Robed Witnesses

Revelation 7:13-17

13 Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

14 I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

- ¹⁵ **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 shelter them with his pres-
 ence.**
- ¹⁶ **‘Never again will they hunger;
 never again will they thirst.
 The sun will not beat down on
 them,’
 nor any scorching heat.**
- ¹⁷ **For the Lamb at the center of the
 throne
 will be their shepherd;
 ‘he will lead them to springs of liv-
 ing water.’
 ‘And God will wipe away every tear
 from their eyes.’”**

13. John is approached with a question from *one of the elders*. The question, “Do you know the who, what, where, when, why, and how of what you see?”

14. John allows the elder to answer. The elder points to two aspects of those in white robes. Regarding their emergence from *great tribulation*, we recall that Christians experience suffering and trials of body and faith. Jesus warned his followers that trouble and persecution were to be expected.

To the audience of Revelation, this could have been related to persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. To modern readers, this could imply a future time of widespread suffering and persecution.

Second, the *robes* have not always been *white*; they have been *washed . . . in the blood of the Lamb*. What the elder describes is the drama that represents Christ’s atonement and our forgiveness from sin based on his sacrificial death. The blood of the John 1:29 provides hope to suffering audiences of any era.

15a. Because they are pure, clothed in white robes, the multitude stands *before*

the throne of God. They *serve him* without pause. Their worship occurs continually.

This vision pictures more than future heavenly bliss; it can also picture our existence now. Acts of worship can be our acknowledgment of a holy God and our submission to him. However, sin prevents us from practicing authentic worship in its entirety. We are free to worship in holiness, in purity, in sincerity, and in truth, for our sins have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. This worship will not be practiced fully and totally until God’s final victory.

15b. This sincere, unfettered worship has another aspect: it occurs when God *will shelter* his people. This alludes to the pitching of a tent, undoubtedly echoing Old Testament tabernacle imagery of God’s dwelling among his people in the tabernacle (Exodus 40). John expresses this similarly when he speaks of Christ’s first coming as the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). We await the day when the people of God are not separated from their Lord and can enter an eternal “Sabbath-rest” in the presence of God (Hebrews 4:9).

16. Physical needs are satisfied in this perfect relationship of continual worship in God’s intimate presence. The saints are in the glorious presence of God, with his protection and blessing.

17. John’s vision returns to the scene of heavenly worship and the source of all hope and salvation: *the Lamb*. Throughout John’s writings, he presents Jesus as a good shepherd. Now he presents the good *shepherd* as the Lamb, leading his followers to *springs of living water*.

Undoubtedly John envisions more than the satiation of physical thirst. The Lamb will lead to “water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). In addition to providing eternal refreshment, the Lamb brings eternal peace and comfort, removing sorrow by wiping *every tear from their eyes*.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

UNITED IN PRAISE

Into the Lesson

0%, 25%, 75%, 100%

Circle the percentage that indicates the part of your typical week spent with people significantly different from yourself? (Differences can include racial, socioeconomic, and cultural aspects.)

Why is this question important?

Someday all these differences will no longer cause divisions. This lesson will explore how that will happen.

Into the Word

What do you know about context of the book of Revelation?

Using study Bibles or online commentaries, explain the significance of each of the following terms:

1—*nations*

2—*tribes*

3—*people*

4—*tongues*

5—*white robes*

6—*palms*

7—*throne*

Make a list answering each of the following statements:

What those in white robes received . . .

What each blessing might mean . . .

Into Life

Return to the differences you mentioned in the first activity. Circle the word from the continuum below that best describes how you think you will feel when being with people of all those differences before God's throne.

Frantic---Troubled---Neutral---Positive---Ecstatic

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Salvation comes through the blood of the Lamb!