

**Suburban Bethlehem Lutheran Church & School**  
**Revelation Bible Study**  
Chapter 7  
Part 2

**Introduction (1:1 - 3:22)**

(Including Seven Letters to the Seven Churches - preparation / call for repentance)

**The Inaugural Vision of Heaven, Introducing the Message (4:1 - 5:14)**

**The Prophecy (6:1 - 16:21)**

1. First Sevenfold Vision of History from the Cross to the End - Seven Seals (6:1 - 8:5)
  - a. The first six seals: tribulations and the end (6:1-17)
  - b. Interlude: The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant (7:1-17)
  - c. The seventh seal introduces the second sevenfold vision (8:1-5)
2. Second Sevenfold Vision of History from the Cross to the End - Disorders in nature accompanied by sufferings of evil afflict humanity - Seven Trumpets (8:6 - 11:19)
3. Interlude - The Cosmic War between Christ and Satan, between God's saints and the forces of evil (12:1 - 14:20)
4. Third Sevenfold Vision of History from the Cross to the End: Plagues of God's Wrath as God's Judgment is poured out on the human race (15:1 - 16:21)

**The Conclusion: The End and the New Heaven and New Earth (17:1 - 22:5)**

**Epilogue (22:6-21)**

**An Important Question**

We have seen the vision of the Church Militant sealed by God as they suffer this side of heaven. The second half of Revelation 7 shifts our focus to the Church Triumphant - the church of all time shining in the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

The shift from Church Militant (deep in apocalyptic visions) to the Church Triumphant (lacking much of the apocalyptic language of the first half of the chapter) begs an important question: Why do we view Revelation 7:1-8 (church militant sealed) in symbolic form (sealing of 144,000) but Revelation 7:9-17 (church triumphant worshiping and praising God for eternity) in literal terms?

- 1) The text itself leads us first to symbolic / apocalyptic interpretation (7:1-8) and then to a literal understanding (7:9-17)
  - a. 7:1-8 is full of symbolic language
    - i. Twelve Tribes
    - ii. Symbolic number (144,000 = 12 x 12,000 (which is 12 x 1,000))
    - iii. Reordering of the Twelve Tribes *especially* leads us to see beyond a literalistic interpretation
  - b. 7:9-17 lacks the nature of symbolism / apocalyptic forms
    - i. Worship
    - ii. White robes / Palm Branches
    - iii. Dwelling of God (see below) is with man
    - iv. Everyday experiences of life on this side of heaven are mentioned (hunger, thirst, scorching heat, and tears)

- 2) The rest of Scripture speaks to this section to shed light on this text:
- a. 7:1-8
    - i. Jesus, Paul and James use Old Testament language for New Testament concepts
    - ii. Centrality of salvation only be grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 14:6 ~ among others)
  - b. 7:9-17
    - i. Rest of Scripture speaks of this same concept that the final composition of heaven will include Jew and Gentile:
      1. Psalm 72:7-11
      2. Isaiah 2:2-3
      3. Isaiah 49:6-8
      4. Isaiah 60:1-3
      5. Zechariah 2:11

7:9) “After this...every tribe, nation, people and language...white robes...Palm branches”

- “After this” is an indication of a slight break between 7:1-8 and 7:9-17. What John saw in 7:1-8 that is comforting to the beleaguered Christian this side of heaven is now surpassed by the great joyful vision of heaven itself in 7:9-17. While the crowd (144,000) seen in 7:1-8 is included in 7:9-17, the crowd in 7:9-17 is much larger (“no one could count”) / fully encompassing all the saints of God in Christ Jesus throughout time.
- This is a crowd that knows no political, geographic, language boundaries. All are united together in their relationship with God the Father and His Lamb, Jesus Christ. A great thing for us to keep in mind - staunch conservative American Christians. As important as it is for us to hold unswervingly to the Word of God (and what a blessing this is from God Himself) it’s not an opportunity for us to become arrogant.
- The countless nature of the saints calls to mind God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants (which, we learned in the earlier part of Revelation 7, all those in faith in Jesus Christ are his descendants regardless of nationality) would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sands upon the seashore (Genesis 15:5; 22:17)
- White Robes - see thoughts below on 7:14
- Palm Branches - Seen as a victory celebration among the Old Testament faithful:
  - o Leviticus 23:40 (part of the Festival of Booths / Tabernacles) - also celebrated in Nehemiah 8:13-17)

- Part of the Celebration of the Cleansing of the Temple (Rededication of Temple) during the time of Simon Maccabaeus (Festival of Purim)
  - <sup>NRS</sup> **2 Maccabees 10:5-8** It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. <sup>6</sup> They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. <sup>8</sup> They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.
- Jesus' own entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (John 12:12-13)
- This is a victory celebration!
- Old custom of burying Christians with a palm branch in hand.

#### 7:10) "Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb"

- Salvation is NOT our own making, but God's. God is the source of salvation
  - Isaiah 43:11
  - Hosea 13:4
  - Jonah 2:9
  - Ephesians 2:8
- Interesting to see it is the saints in triumph are shouting out this song of praise.
- No greater praise can be given to God than that His creatures attribute their salvation to Him and to His Christ. This is the nature of worship.
- The Redemption of God's people in Christ is the most important action since God's creation of all life.
  - Isaiah 43:1
  - Isaiah 44:2
  - Psalm 100:3

#### 7:11) "They fell down...worshipped God"

- The verb for "worship" here has the idea of an expression of profound reverence. We will see something slightly different for worship later in this chapter.

## 7:12) “and...and...and...and...”

- The original language of the New Testament will sometimes use repeating “ands” to emphasize the thought how all the items mentioned are intrinsically connected to each other.
- Sometimes the rules of grammar need to be suspended (as many English translations do for this verse).

## 7:13-14) Identification of the great multitude

- God’s wonderful rules of mathematics and physics:
  - o 3 = 1 (Trinity)
  - o 2 = 1 (union of two natures in one person Jesus Christ)
  - o Red = White
    - Note carefully this is connected to the Lamb
    - Hebrews 9:14
    - Have we, in our modern world, lost touch with the cleansing power of blood?
    - Here is the poem by Johnny Hart in Palm Sunday “B.C.” Cartoon (L.A. Times refused to publish):

*Picture yourself tied to a tree,  
condemned of the sins of eternity.  
Then picture a spear, parting the air,  
seeking your heart to cut your despair.  
Suddenly—a knight, in armor of white,  
stands in the gap betwixt you and its flight,  
And shedding his ‘armor of God’ for you—  
bears the lance that runs him through.  
His heart has been pierced that yours may beat,  
and the blood of his corpse washes your feet.  
Picture yourself in raiment white,  
cleansed by the blood of the lifeless knight.  
Never to mourn,  
the prince who was downed,  
For he is not lost! It is you who are found.*

## Great Tribulation

- Acts 14:22
- Matthew 24:15-31 - Jesus describes the tribulations that must be endured before His return (note especially 24:21)
- Revelation 20:7 - “great tribulation” certainly describes what will happen in that “short time” before the return of Jesus
- Since every Christian experiences testing of faith and witness, every such trial points to the future “great tribulation” at the End and becomes at that moment in time a great tribulation for that believer.

7:15) “Serve Him...will spread His tent over them”

- “Serve” - different verb than in 7:11 - this is also the same root word from which we get “liturgy.”
  - o See also Romans 12:1 (where the noun is used)
- “spread His tent”
  - o Exodus 25:9
  - o Exodus 26:1, 13
  - o Hebrews 8:2-5
  - o Hebrews 9:2-21
  - o John 1:14
  
  - o Jesus is the replacement of the Tabernacle / Temple
  
  - o Emphasizes a *familiar* and *in the flesh* dwelling with Jesus Christ - He will dwell with us in a way that can be experienced by the human senses.

7:16) “Never again...”

- What is “scorching heat” for you? (And I’m not talking about the weather!)
  
- This is the absence of every physical trauma.
  
- Notice how human language, this side of heaven, has a difficult time fully explaining what life in the new heaven / new earth will be like. We are constantly forced to use terms / ideas/ language familiar to us now, but those terms, ideas, and language will no longer be part of our experience in heaven!

7:17) “For the Lamb...will be their shepherd...springs of living water...wipe every tear”

- See also:
  - o Isaiah 49:8-10
  - o Psalm 23:2
  - o John 4:14
  - o John 7:38-39
  
- The final word describing the peace and joy of the saints before God in heaven says it all: “And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

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