

OBSERVATION STUDY SERIES

REVELATION

THE GREAT MULTITUDE

7:9-17

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The Great Multitude

A remarkable group will come out of the Great Tribulation—the Great Multitude. They will come *out of* the Great Tribulation... but *into* where? Into the innermost court of heaven where the Great God of the Universe sits perpetually on His throne... into the presence of the Glorious Majesty Who will usher them into eternal safety and everlasting life... into the arms of the Great Shepherd... The Lamb, Himself...

Six seals of judgment were broken in Revelation 6, but now Revelation 7 shows us an interlude—a parenthetical insert, if you will. The interlude reveals two massive groups: the 144,000 and the Great Multitude. John wrote about the 144,000 bond-servants of God in the first half of Revelation 7. Now, before the seventh seal is broken (in Revelation 8), he tells us about the other group—the Great Multitude.

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

After what things?

After John saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree...

After John saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God...

After the angel ascending from the rising of the sun cried out with a loud voice to the four angels (the ones to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea), “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads”...

After John heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel...

After those things...

Then John looked and saw a great multitude. This multitude was so enormous, no one could even count the persons in attendance.

Even though we don't know the number of the multitude, can we know *who* is in attendance? Are they Jew or Gentile? They are from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues—these are Gentiles.

Where are they? They are in heaven because the Lamb is in heaven. And they are specifically standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They are in heaven. This is a great multitude (predominantly Gentile) in heaven. (The 144,000 from the first half of the interlude are Jews and they are on the earth—they are going to be witnesses on the earth.)

How is the great multitude dressed? They have white robes. This is interesting because we saw a group earlier (remember the souls under the altar in the fifth seal?) who were given white robes—this great multitude is now wearing white robes. Could they be the same persons?

What do they hold in their hands? Palm branches. It seems clear just from what the great multitude is crying out that their palm branches must be part of the praise they are offering to God and to the Lamb.

The only other place in the New Testament where palm branches are used is in John 12:12-13 when the large crowd who had come to the Passover Feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. They took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him. They began to shout, "*Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel.*"

The Old Testament, in Leviticus 23:38-44, talks about using palm branches in the celebration of the Feast of Booths. Zechariah 14:16 talks about the future Feast of Booths which will be held in Jerusalem each and every year of the Lord's 1,000 year reign over the earth. Because our purpose is to simply observe the main and plain things in Revelation, I will not delve into the Feast of Booths at this time, but I thought you might want to have the references so you could do a little studying on your own!

Now, back to Revelation 7. What is this great multitude doing?

...and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Revelation 7:10

They are crying out with a loud voice. The Greek word for "cry out" is *krazo* and means to croak, scream, or shriek. This is the same exact word used to describe what the souls under the altar did. Again, it makes me wonder if the group is the same—although later in time, and joined by the ones they were to wait for...

They vehemently exclaim their praise, not with different voices, but with one mighty unified voice.

They are crying “Salvation to our God Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”. This multitude has been saved—saved from the wrath of God, saved from their mortal life in human bodies, and evidently delivered from the tribulation which will intensify on the earth in the last days. They know their salvation... their deliverance... is due solely to their God and the Lamb—they owe everything to them.

...And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God... Revelation 7:11

I love this! It seems that the heavenly creatures (who have definitely spent loads of quality time worshiping and praising God in the past) can't resist the urge to continue their worship and praise—and so they join in with the great multitude. All the angels who are standing around the throne, and all the elders, and the four living creatures—each fall on their faces before the throne and worship God!

...saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” Revelation 7:12

What a scene! What an example! What great praise and worship our God deserves—both now and forevermore!!! Amen! Blessing! Glory! Wisdom! Thanksgiving! Honor! Power! Might! ...be to our God forever and ever! Amen!

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” Revelation 7:13

One of the elders now asks John a question about his vision. The elder asks, “*Who are these who are clothed in the white robes and where have they come from?*” He asks the question, not because he doesn't know but because he wants to make sure John knows. This was typical of Jewish teachers. The teacher would ask a question to which he knew the student did not have the answer. The student would then give all his attention to the teacher in hopes of receiving the answer. (Being a Bible teacher myself, I know the great value of this technique.) John is maneuvered by the tactic and answers appropriately...

I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:14

Chronologically in the book of Revelation, the Great Tribulation has not actually started yet. This parenthetical insert which we are observing is pointing forward to it, though.

The great multitude is made up of those who will come out of the Great Tribulation which will take place in the last 3 1/2 years before Jesus comes again (the last half of Daniel's 70th week). Don't worry if you are not familiar with the timing of these events right now—I believe you will be once we are through with this overview of Revelation!

The individuals in this great multitude have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—they are believers.

For this reason they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. Revelation 7:15

For what reason? They are before the throne of God for one reason—because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

What are they doing? Day and night they are in God's temple serving Him. That is what goes on in heaven now and that is what is going to go on in the presence of God for all of eternity. The inhabitants of heaven (where this scene takes place), and someday, the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, will serve, and worship, the LORD their God in His temple day and night.

And joy of joys, beauty of beauties, He will spread His tabernacle over them. Oh, the glory! Oh, the bliss! Oh, the blessed peace!

...They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat... Revelation 7:16

Who are these people? Why does it specifically mention hunger, thirst, the sun beating down on them, and heat? Why would they be hungry and thirsty? Why would the sun be beating down on them?

Think for a moment about where they have come from—the Great Tribulation. What would have been their situation during the Tribulation? We know that those who do not take the mark of the beast will not be able to buy food or water; they will also not be able to afford housing—they will be out in the cold, so to speak... or in this case... out in the heat of the sun.

I don't want to give away anything that we haven't observed yet... but... let me give you a little teaser from later in the book of Revelation—it's sort of like our own parenthetical insertion or interlude! Read on...

The seventh seal is about to be broken, which means the seven trumpet judgments are about to begin. The trumpets will be followed by seven bowl judgments—although technically the seven bowl judgments are the seventh trumpet, just as the seven trumpets are the seventh seal.

Don't worry—you will understand it when we get to it and observe it. Anyway... what I want you to see is something in the bowl judgments. Why? Because the bowl judgments take place during the last 3 1/2 years of Daniel's 70th week—which is... the Great Tribulation. Since this great multitude came out of the Great Tribulation, we might

very well find some understanding of their situation if we glance (no more than a glance because we are not there yet) at the judgments which take place during that time.

Let's look first at the second and third bowl judgments. Revelation 16:3-4 says, **"The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died. Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood."** No wonder those who were taken out of the Great Tribulation (through death) had hungered and thirsted. Look what had happened to the waters of the earth—the sea, the rivers, and the springs of waters had become blood. The only source of clean water would seem to be rainfall which would make it very scarce. Lack of water has caused thirst, but it had also caused hunger—think how hard it would be to prepare meals on a daily basis without water. And the next bowl would ensure that even rainfall water would be quickly evaporated.

The fourth bowl will be poured out by the fourth angel (which we will observe when we get there!). Revelation 16:8-9 says, **"The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory."** Although the ones who blasphemed the Name of God were not believers, those who were believers living on the earth at that time were subjected to the consequences of the judgments just the same. Can there be any doubt as to what is being referred to in Revelation 7:16 when it says, **"nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat."**

Okay... I just wanted you to see some very relevant information about this Great Multitude. Now, back to our present text—Revelation 7. These people in the great multitude have been hungry; they have thirsted; the sun has been beating down on them... Reason through a little further with me. These people are predominantly Gentiles. But, depending on when the Rapture happens, the church (which is also predominantly Gentiles) will quite possibly have been taken away before the Great Tribulation begins in full (at the Day of the LORD). So the ones who came out of the Great Tribulation are most likely not the church.

If these people are not the church, but they are mostly Gentiles, and if they have been through part of the Great Tribulation... then who are they? I can't help but think of the last portion of Matthew 25 where we see the Son of Man separating the sheep from the goats during the judgment of the nations. The sheep are the ones who took care of the Jews during the Great Tribulation—they gave them food and drink, shelter and clothing, they visited them in prison.

Now, the judgment of the nations takes place on earth after Jesus returns in all His Glory, and the ones in the great multitude are in heaven before Jesus returns. The multitude will be made up of those who died during the Great Tribulation so they must be part of the same group—just the ones that will die before Jesus returns.

...for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Revelation 7:17

Why will the believers in the great multitude no longer hunger or thirst? Why will the sun no longer beat down on them? Because the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their Shepherd! He will guide them to springs of the water of Life!

Why would they have been crying? They came out of the Great Tribulation, that's why. Revelation 14:13 tells us this: *"And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.""*

This is interesting. Yes, those who come out of the Great Tribulation will be blessed. God will wipe every tear from their eyes—the tears which came from what they had been through in the Tribulation—the hunger, the thirst, the heat, and everything else that will be so horrible in that time. God will take care of all their suffering—there won't be any more tribulation for them. This is talking about specific tears—tears produced by the sufferings from the Great Tribulation. It doesn't say that He wipes away everybody's tears... that's because He won't until later. Stay tuned!

Something else that is very interesting—have you noticed where the songs have appeared? Remember, I told you in the introduction about a neat little pattern? In chapters 4 and 5 there were songs. What happened right afterward in chapter 6? Six seals were broken which brought six judgments. We have now seen an interlude and once again, what did we hear? One, two, three songs? What is going to happen now? The judgment will be taken up again. Do you see it? Songs before judgment.

If you knew God's judgment was about to come, wouldn't you sing for joy? Wouldn't you praise Him for His judgment? If you understood His righteous justice, you would. Keep noticing this pattern as we continue through Revelation. It will show up again.

The interlude is over and John is about to return to the breaking of the seals. The seventh seal is still to come, and there will be silence in heaven for about half an hour when the Lamb breaks it.

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Revelation 8:1

From the beginning of John's vision of heaven we have heard loud, continuous praise around the throne. Now there will be silence in heaven... bone-chilling silence... terrifying silence... All of heaven will be silent...