

Commentary on Revelation 7:9-17

By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, May 15, 2011**, is from **Revelation 7:9-17**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below.

Revelation 7:9-17

9 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.

The gospel will be preached to people of all languages, races, and political groupings large and small. Some from all of these groups will receive the gospel and come to trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; therefore, a great multitude that only God can count and even know by name will appear before the throne of God. They are robed in white because the blood of the Lamb has washed their sins away and they are cleansed of all unrighteousness. By their righteous deeds in the power of the Holy Spirit, they have kept their robes clean. They wave palm branches as some did when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

They knew that they were not saved by their good words or works; rather, they were saved by the love and grace of God, which the Lamb made possible by His sacrificial death on the cross. Whereas those around God stand in His honor, God remains seated on His throne as any monarch; but God is Sovereign LORD over all. God freely bestows grace, peace and salvation upon all who receive the Lamb, Jesus Christ, as their Lord and Savior, by faith.

11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

These angels and the four living creatures never sinned or rebelled against God. They also fall on their faces before God in adoration, wonder, and worship because through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God the Father's only Son, God has saved sinners from every nation and language who repented of their sins and came to faith in Jesus Christ. God has no prejudice against others, and these angels know that God is worthy to be praised, for He has saved some from every tribe and tongue. The heavenly host give all glory to God for the salvation of sinners, because they know that sinners do not earn or merit salvation. Rather, all is from God's grace.

12 singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

One of the most complicated problems any good leader or good government faces is how to both justly and mercifully forgive and restore to faithful and obedient citizenship any who have rebelled against them or their leadership. God knew how to do this in the establishment of the Kingdom of God through Jesus and His sacrificial death that wins our love and loyalty (though we had once been sinners and rebels). Therefore, the angels attribute all of these attributes to God and proclaim that God and the Lamb deserve glory and thanks and every honor.

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?”

The Book of Revelation proves that we cannot learn some facts from a lifetime of experience or unaided reason. Some truths must be revealed to us by God and His angels and prophets and Jesus Christ himself. One of the elders shows this by the question he asks John and John’s reply. John needed the vision and the explanation of the vision to understand, and even then John was told not to reveal everything he learned in heaven when he wrote the Revelation. Without the help of the Holy Spirit and the whole Bible, we cannot understand much of Revelation or the rest of Scripture.

14 I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Indeed, the elder did know who these were. The great ordeal or the great tribulation may mean life as all believers know it from living in a fallen world among unbelievers and from fighting spiritual battles against the enemies of our souls. Or the great tribulation may be a special period of suffering in history (now or in the future). Here, John is told by the elder that salvation, in part, depends on the choices and actions by those the Lamb saves. The Lamb provides the cleansing blood and we must choose whether or not we will wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb. Rather than stain a white cloth as our blood would, the blood of the Lamb will make a cloth robes white (which of course is symbolic). Jesus offers us salvation, and believers choose to receive His offer and His shed blood in their behalf so He can cleanse them from their sins. Salvation can be received or rejected, as the Book of Revelation makes clear with the final battle against those who have rebelled against God and persist in their rebellion.

15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

Those saved by grace through faith and the angels who witnessed the work of salvation by the Father and the Son praise God continually out of loving, grateful hearts that experience wonder as the depth of God’s love and saving purposes.

Believers will live in the massive, extensive, temple of God (which will include a multitude that no believer can count).

16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;

For believers, all suffering and disappointment are ended in heaven. They will not suffer internally in any way – no hunger or thirst, for all needs will be provided. They will not suffer externally in any way – no scorching heat or burning sun. God will meet all of the needs any believer might have. Moreover, the Bible says our bodies will be raised imperishable (see 1 Corinthians 15).

17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Here, John makes clear that the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is God, because He is at the center of the throne of God where God sits. The Father and the Son, two Persons, are one God who receives worship as God. The Lamb gladly receives our worship; whereas angels and believers refuse the worship of other angels or people. The Lamb made His sacrifice in the past for us. Risen from the dead, He cares for us as our Shepherd now and for eternity. He will meet our every spiritual need. If for any reason we feel sorrow and the need to cry, He himself will care for us, for He is God.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. How would you reply to someone who said that those who believe what the Bible teaches are prejudiced against people of other races or religions?
2. Why do you think the Bible teaches that salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb? Why do you think the Bible includes the Person of the Lamb and calls Him the Lamb rather than by one of His other titles?
3. Why do we need a revelation (or revelations) from God, and not just experience and reason, to know God? In what ways are experience and reason still important for believers to know God?
4. Why could it be dangerous to base all of your knowledge of God only on your spiritual experiences instead of also on the Bible and your use of reason?
5. What do these few verses from Revelation say God has done for us? From these few verses, what does God expect people to do in response? According to these verses, how many people did John see who responded rightly to what God has done?

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