

All People Praise God

Bible Background • Revelation 7:9-17

Printed Text • Revelation 7:9-17 | Devotional Reading • Revelation 1:1-8

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will UNDERSTAND how God's salvation and justice for all people inspires praise and worship; EMBRACE the significance of praising God in unity; and RESPOND to God's love, goodness, and grace with joy and exaltation.

In Focus

"I hate you, Mom!" Seventeen-year-old Curtis shouted as he slammed the door behind him. Patricia sank down in a kitchen chair, too weary to engage in another battle with her headstrong teenager. Her head was throbbing, and her heart was aching. First, her husband had lost his job. Then, her mother was diagnosed with cancer. And now, her son was rebelling against everything he had been taught.

Whom could she call? Where could she go? In a panic as she paced the floor, she called Sister Gladys from church.

Gladys listened to the whole rant and worry before saying, "Yep. That sounds about right. Have you tried praising God?"

"Oh, I've been praying..." Patricia said.

"No, no, no, not praying. Praising! Praise Him for being with you in these trials."

Patricia stopped in her pacing around the kitchen, and began to think back over the last few years of her life. She had been through many difficult times before. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. God had been with her, helping her through all of those times. Patricia's heart lifted as she remembered God's faithfulness. She could trust Him to do what He said He would do.

How do we find the faith to trust God in difficult times? When we remember God's track record of grace and mercy, our faith is strengthened, giving us the courage to trust Him again. In times of trouble, we can count on God to keep His promises.

Keep In Mind

"These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white." (from Revelation 7:14, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Number (Revelation 7:9) *arithmosai* (Gk.) – An amount, fixed or indefinite

B. Blessing (v. 12) *eulogia* (Gk.) – Speaking well of, commending in eloquent language

Say It Correctly

Timbrel. TIM-brul.

Yom Kippur. YOM ki-POOR.

KJV

Revelation 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

NLT

Revelation 7:9 After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.

10 And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!"

11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God.

12 They sang, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and ever! Amen."

13 Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?"

14 And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.

15 "That is why they stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter.

16 They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun.

17 For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of lifegiving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

The People, Places, and Times

Authorship. The author of Revelation identifies himself as “John” (1:4). Most of the early church scholars identified this “John” as the apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James. John, the writer of Revelation, was exiled to the island of Patmos as a consequence for spreading the Word of God and testifying to the existence and ministry of Jesus Christ. It was during this time of exile that he received the vision from God, the “revelation,” which he faithfully recorded according to Jesus’ instruction and for future generations (1:11).

Living Water. The multitude will enjoy eternal blessings, including “living fountains of waters” (7:17). “Living” water is water that is not stagnant; it is flowing from some source such as a spring or a river. It is constantly being renewed. Spiritually speaking, Jesus is the source of “living water” to those who are believers. When it is the right time, this living water will flow through the world, cleansing it (see Isaiah 35:5–10; Zechariah 14:20–21).

Compare and contrast these “living fountains of waters” (Revelation 7:17) with David’s “still waters” (Psalm 23:2).

Background

In Revelation 5, John saw God holding a scroll that was sealed with seven seals. Jesus, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” was the only one in heaven who was worthy to open the seals (5:5). Each time Jesus opened one of the seals, a corresponding judgment was visited upon the earth. Revelation 7 opens with four angels holding back the wind, signaling an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. The events of our text today concerning the “great multitude” (7:9) take place during this lull.

At-A-Glance

1. The Great Multitude (Revelation 7:9–10)
2. The Great Choir (vv. 11–12)
3. The Great Promises (vv. 13–17)

In Depth

1. The Great Multitude (Revelation 7:9–10) John sees a new scene before him: a “great multitude” of people—so many that no one could count them (v. 9). They are of all different races, different cultures, and different languages. Nevertheless, all of these people have much in common with one another. All are wearing the white robes of the redeemed, waving the palm branches of the victorious, crying out: “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (v. 10).

In ancient times, dusty streets and manual labor mandated sturdy, functional clothing, not something that would show dirt quickly. This meant white garments were reserved for special occasions such as religious ceremonies and celebrations (2 Chronicles 5:12; Ecclesiastes 9:8). Festive palm branches were waved in conjunction with singing hymns and psalms, usually to celebrate a victory, but also during the reading of certain portions of Scripture and during feast days at the Tabernacle.

What would a modern crowd wear or wave to show celebration for God?

2. The Great Choir (vv. 11–12) Joining in the praises of the great multitude are the rest of God’s heavenly inhabitants—the angels, elders, and the “four beasts” (Revelation 7:11). These heavenly beings are constantly around the throne, worshiping and singing praise to God. In response to the worship of the great multitude, this heavenly choir leads the inhabitants of the throne room in a doxology, consisting of seven specific attributes of God and beginning and ending with an “amen” (v. 12). According to some scholars, there being seven items on this list implies their praise is complete or perfect.

3. The Great Promises (vv. 13–17) During the great praise celebration around the throne, one of the elders explains that these are God’s redeemed who have overcome. They have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, all of their sin washed away. They remained faithful through great tribulation and trials (vv. 13–14). Because of this, they would now receive eternal rewards. They forever enjoy the presence of God. Jesus, the Lamb of God, will be our Shepherd. He will lead us to those springs of living water— His very life, flowing through us. And there will be no more cause to mourn (v. 17). God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. What joy! Our God loves us with an everlasting love! And because God keeps His promises, we have the courage to be faithful to a faithful God.

What are some rewards mentioned throughout Scripture for those who overcome trials in God’s name?

Search the Scriptures

1. John saw a “great multitude” standing before the throne. What was the multitude doing (Revelation 7:9–10)?
2. Who else was standing around the throne besides the multitude (v. 11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. The great multitude was enthusiastically worshiping God around the throne after coming through great trials and tribulation. How can their example help us live the life to which God has called each one of us?
2. The angels, elders, and creatures sang a doxology, ascribing praise to God in seven different ways. What are some specific aspects of God’s nature for which Christians should praise Him? Why should we do this?

Liberating Lesson

Many people in our world today are concerned about the future. They wonder and worry about the economy, the environment, world peace, and their own families and friends. Christians are not excluded from the troubles and trials of this fallen, flawed world in which we live. But we have what the rest of the world does not—we have hope. Because of God’s record of faithfulness in His Word, and to us personally, we have hope to face life’s uncertainties.

Application for Activation

We, too, face these same trials in our own lives as believers. Satan wages a war against every person who chooses to follow Jesus Christ as Lord. We may not face an executioner’s sword, but we will be tested and tried as we live out our lives of service to God. How can we worship God in the middle of a difficult, pain-filled situation? The key is this: God is always faithful to His own. When we are faced with an untenable situation, we must look back to what God has already done on our behalf. When we start to meditate on God’s faithfulness, we will begin to feel our faith rise to meet the challenge of the day. Keep a journal to aid you in remembering and rejoicing in God’s faithfulness to you personally.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Revelation 7:9–17 **9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.**

The expressions “after this” and “after these things” are familiar time markers moving us forward in the book of Revelation (see 1:19; 4:1; 7:1; 18:1; 19:1). John has just seen a group of 144,000 from the tribes of Israel sealed by God’s angel.

Now “after this,” John sees a heavenly crowd beyond calculation. These are believing individuals from “all nations (Gk. *ethnos*), and kindreds (Gk. *phule*), and people (Gk. *laos*), and tongues (Gk. *glossa*).” The point of using all four of these synonyms is not to highlight their different shades of meaning, but to emphasize the overwhelming variety of the crowd. Not a single demographic of any kind is overlooked. Placed as it is directly following the election of 144,000 Jews, this multitude assures believers that God cares not just for the nation He chose long ago in Abraham, but for all humans who bear His image. Having “palms in their hands” reminds us of the festive celebration at Jesus’ triumphal entry during the last week of His earthly life (John 12:13). Palm branches were also used regularly at the Jewish annual Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Booths; Leviticus 23:40).

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

“Salvation to our God” means that salvation belongs to God. God is the only source of rescue from the ultimate ruin and judgment to come. Therefore, salvation “is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). This gift of salvation comes to us through the Lamb, Jesus, who sacrificed Himself to work out a way for our salvation.

11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

Picture a series of circles around the heavenly throne. The outer ring is composed of all the angels. Nearer are the 24 elders and the four living creatures—the cherubim, each with a face of a different creature and each with six wings completely covered with eyes (Revelation 4:6–8; see also Ezekiel

1:5–16). The inside circle is composed of the throng dressed in white (v. 9). Each group falls prostrate and gives praise to God.

The Greek for “elders” is *presbuteros* (pres- **BOO**-ter-os), which means older or senior persons and can also mean representatives. John first sees them in his heavenly vision dressed in white, wearing crowns, and sitting on thrones (Revelation 4:4). They cast their crowns before the throne of God (v. 10). We also read that they continually worship and praise God (Revelation 5:11, 14; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4); they encourage John when the vision causes him to cry (5:5); they bring to God the prayers of the saints (5:8); and one of them helps John understand the vision (7:13). Their robes and crowns might symbolize how they have remained faithful to God unto death (2:10, 3:4). Many have thought that they represent the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 apostles. Jesus promised the apostles 12 thrones for following the Lord (Matthew 19:27–29). Others have seen in them an illusion to the 24 representative priestly leaders (there were too many priests for all to serve) first mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24:1–19.

12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

Now the angels are fallen prostrate before God, saying “amen” to the previous praise of the multitude and then giving their own words of praise, every word of which is meaningful. First they ascribe blessing to God. The Greek for “blessing” is *eulogia* (yoo-log-**EE**-ah), which is the same root as for “eulogy,” the words of praise we offer the dead at a funeral. The Greek word includes the sense of speaking well of, commending in eloquent language, and praising our living God. We should be always blessing God because He both created us and redeemed us.

Next, the angels ascribe “glory” to God. This word refers to God’s radiant splendor. His presence physically illumines His surroundings. This is why He will be the light of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:5).

The angels also ascribe “wisdom” (Gk. *sophia*, so-**FEE**-ah) to God. This is wisdom in the spiritual sense as well as in the sense of knowledge. All truth and all knowledge come from God. Then the angels offer “thanksgiving” to God. We also should be continually thanking God for all the wonderful things He is doing and has done for us. Fifth, the angels ascribe “honour” to God. God is God and He is worthy to be worshiped. In our prayers, we may forget and focus on the things we want from God, instead of worshiping Him as He deserves.

Then the angels ascribe “power” to God. God’s hand is never shortened so that it cannot save us (Isaiah 59:1). In the end, everything will be worked out according to His will. Amazingly, He uses His power to save us.

Finally, the angels ascribe “might,” or strength, to God. We often find we do not have the strength in ourselves to do the things we wish to do for our God, but the secret is in drawing upon His strength. As we look at the angels’ words of continuous praise, we can meditate upon these words and offer them up to God as well.

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? 14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

At this juncture, one of the 24 elders speaks up for only the second time in the Book of Revelation. Old Testament visions often involved similar exchanges between a knowledgeable heavenly being and the seer (Zechariah 4:1–6; Jeremiah 1:11–14).

Many read the Bible's uses of the term "tribulation" in one of two ways: (1) to refer to the general trials throughout all the ages (Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3) and (2) to refer to the specific time of tribulation prior to end-time events. Examples of the second usage include one of Daniel's later visions: "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (from Daniel 12:1). Hundreds of years later, Jesus also foretells a "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). This multitude could be comprised of those who have experienced tribulation in both senses.

There is a striking irony in the image of washing a garment in blood and it coming out white. However, this whitening or cleansing is like none other on earth, for these people have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (cf. Isaiah 1:18). This is why we sing, "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

The last three verses are often read or quoted at funerals because they beautifully depict the current condition of those who are now with the Lord. The afterlife is not a do-nothing time of leisure and laziness. His people "serve him day and night" (v. 15). Of course, there in that perfect environment we will not have any tiredness, drudgery, poor pay, or lack of motivation, for His sinless servants serve Him willingly and joyfully. We will be engaged in wonderful work without any weariness. While our deceased loved ones who belong to God currently enjoy His presence, after the final resurrection we will worship God in this way with our new bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44). No tired muscles or minds then! John's final vision of the New Heaven echoes this truth (Revelation 22:1-5).

God is pictured throughout Revelation as the One who sits upon or occupies the throne. The saints will gather around the throne, so that God will "dwell" among us. The Greek verb *skenoō* (skay-**NO**-oh) is only used by John in the New Testament. It is used of people who will or do live in heaven, and importantly it is applied to Jesus' incarnation at the beginning of John's Gospel: "The Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This verb is interesting because it is based on the word *skene* (Gk. skeep-**NAY**), which means "tent." By using this word, John recalls the tent structure of the Tabernacle and the days of God's presence in the wilderness, so overt and caring.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

In contrast to the problems faced by many people in agricultural societies (such as the Israelites of long ago), there will be no hunger, thirst, or heat. John's audience knew an oasis could mean the difference between life and death. Remember how Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the desert until their water ran out and she thought they would die (Genesis 21:14–19). Today, many of us are often strapped with bills that chase us from payday to payday. None of that there! No needs go unmet. No stress or frustration. No more doing without.

17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The book of Revelation gives many paradoxical pictures that surprise and baffle us. For example, we see the Lion who is a Lamb (Revelation 5:5–6) who is the light (21:23). Revelation 7:17 reveals another one of these amazing pictures: the Lamb who is our Shepherd (cf. John 10:11) as He feeds and waters His people. The last benefit in Revelation 7:17 is that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” When drive-by shootings, abandoned newborns, gambled-away money, and hungry children cause us to cry, we have the promise of God that one day He will put all of that away (see also Revelation 22:3). In response to this wonderful truth, His people can only shout, “Hallelujah!” Yes, eventually we will live happily ever after.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

May God's Ways Be Known
(Psalm 67)

TUESDAY

The Nations Flock to Mount Zion
(Isaiah 2:1-5)

WEDNESDAY

Make Disciples of All Nations
(Matthew 28:16-20)

THURSDAY

Gentiles Seek the Lord
(Zechariah 8:18-23)

FRIDAY

All the Nations Will Glorify God
(Psalm 86:1-11)

SATURDAY

God's Servants Sealed
(Revelation 7:1-8)

SUNDAY

Multitudes Praise God
(Revelation 7:9-17)