

9. The Great Multitude in Heaven

Revelation 7:9-17

The Book of Revelation

YouTube video link: <https://youtu.be/pPNxwrgwmio>

We come now to a wonderful part in this book of Revelation, the white-robed multitude. In our previous study, we looked at Revelation 7:1-8, where Scripture tells us of the sealing of [144,000 from Israel](#). This sealing of what we believe to be Jewish Messianic believers takes place after the [Sixth Seal and Cosmic Disturbances](#) in the heavens. Both Matthew and Mark's Gospels record that, after the cosmic signs in the sky, the Lord intervenes and sends forth His angels to gather all true believers, referred to as the "elect." In our last study, we saw this in Matthew's Gospel (24:29-31), so let's now also look at what Mark records Jesus as saying:

²⁴But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' ²⁶At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens (Mark 13:24-27).

This gathering (rapture) of God's people, the elect, takes place in the second half of the seven-year period; no man knows the day or time. Following the time of distress (*tribulation @* KJV) and persecution, the sun will be darkened, and there is a shaking of the earth, as well as the stars falling from the sky (cf. Isaiah 24:18-23). Mark writes that, at that very time, the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Himself, will come with great power and glory and send forth His angels to snatch up (rapture) all those who have entered into the New Covenant bought by His blood.

The Book of Revelation also tells us of this great gathering in heaven. John now beholds a great multitude. The complete number of the redeemed stand before the Lord, and the blessings of the eternal state are about to be realized.

A Great Multitude Standing Before the Throne of God

⁹After this I looked and saw a multitude too large to count, from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell facedown before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 7:9-12).

Why are the great multitude wearing white robes and holding palm branches? (v. 9). What is the significance of these things?

In this vision, John sees a great multitude—too many to count—clothed in white robes. White robes speak of holiness and purity: "But you do have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled

their garments, and because they are worthy, they will walk with Me in white” (Revelation 3:4). Standing with white robes before the presence of God speaks of the priesthood of Israel, who wore white garments when they ministered before the Lord.¹ On the Day of Atonement, even the High Priest took off his very special robes, and after dipping and cleansing himself in the Mikvah, the ritual bath, he could only wear a white robe when he drew near to God. The multitude of people before the throne of God wear the white robes of priests because they have been made priests by being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. “**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession...**” (1 Peter 2:9). The saved and delivered multitude are also seen holding palm branches, symbolic of celebration as on Palm Sunday when those who welcomed the coming King Jesus into Jerusalem laid down palm branches before Him (John 12:13). God commanded Israel to rejoice at the Feast of Tabernacles and wave palm branches in celebration before the Lord (Leviticus 23:40). The scene before us here is one of great rejoicing before God and the giving of thanks, as well as a celebration of victory, not only from the multitude but also from the angels in attendance. The multitude in white robes also represented victory in that day for a Roman general celebrated his triumph in white. The Palm was also a symbol of victory which would sometimes be waved in times of triumph or celebration.

As Matthew and Mark both tell us, the Lord's coming and the angels' gathering the saints happens during the time of distress (tribulation) and after the cosmic signs. How do we know this great multitude standing before the throne are those caught up (raptured) by the angels at the coming of Christ? Some say the multitude of believers is those martyred in the Great Tribulation. My response would be that the passage does not say they were martyred believers; instead, the multitude are those raptured and delivered up by the angels from the persecution and tribulation before God's wrath is poured out. God's wrath is about to occur at the opening of the last and final seal of the scroll in the Lamb's hand. The rapture and the wrath of God are a back-to-back event with no time in between. Jesus gave us two examples of what this time will be like in Luke 17:26-30. Let's look first at the instance of Noah.

The Example of Noah's Time (Luke 17:26-27)

²⁶Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-27, Emphasis added).

Both Noah and Lot were two righteous men (Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:7) who lived for God when people lived only for themselves. In Noah's day, the corruption and depth of evil on earth were so bad that God had to judge their sin. Notice the superlatives in the following text: “**The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). Those who were shut out of the ark were complacent or in agreement with the evil around them. They thought everything was fine, carrying on their lives with no concern for righteousness or eternal things; they were at home in the evil world in which they lived. Jesus said, “**People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark” (v. 27).****

¹ http://www.jewishmag.com/123mag/priest_clothing/priest_clothing.htm.

The Lord was saying that, before He comes, there will be a time when terrible evil will manifest, but just as in Noah's day, people will carry on thinking that everything is O.K., i.e., business as usual, unconcerned about the corruption around them. Eating, drinking, and planning their marriages depict most people living only for the moment, blissfully callous about the evil practices going on in the world and unaware of the impending judgment. When Noah preached that the Lord was going to judge them, the people ignored his proclamation of judgment (2 Peter 2:4-5). It is the same today; most people carry on unconcerned about what God has said. When the Lord ushered His chosen into the ark and shut the door, judgment fell that same day (Genesis 7:11-16). Notice, it says the same day! There will be no second chance once believers are lifted, snatched up, or raptured. God will shut the door of salvation (Matthew 25:10; Luke 13:28). The time to make peace with God is now. The Lord gave a second example of what it would be like at the time of His coming:

The Example from Lot's Time

²⁸It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹But **the day** Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰**It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed** (Luke 17:28-30, emphasis added).

What lesson should we take from Jesus' words above? In Lot's day, people were all going about their lives in the same way before the day of God's judgment came. They were unprepared. If they had heard the warning from Noah or his family, they had dismissed it. It all happened very quickly and unexpectedly. In both examples, the Lord intervened to spare the godly, while on the same day, He began the judgment of the ungodly. In the passage we are studying in Revelation, the Lord has not yet opened the seventh seal, bringing God's wrath; the focus is on the events that occur before God's wrath begins. At the sixth seal cosmic disturbances, we read of those people outside of Christ, searching for a place to hide from the presence of the Lord and crying out, **"Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"** (Revelation 6:16-17 ESV). Who can stand? There is only one place where people can stand at such a time, and believers from Israel and all over the world are those caught up to God's throne and standing before God in pure white (Revelation 7:9).

Washed and Clean White Robes

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me: "These in white robes," he asked, "who are they, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴"Sir," I answered, "you know." So he replied, "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵For this reason, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and the One seated on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. ¹⁶'Never again will they hunger, and never will they thirst; nor will the sun beat down upon them, nor any scorching heat.' ¹⁷For the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd. 'He will lead them to springs of living water,' and 'God will wipe away every tear from their eyes'" (Revelation 7:13-17).

In this passage in the Book of Revelation, what words or phrases speak the most to you about God's character and purposes? What phrases would you underline as personally speaking to you?

Let us take a few moments to consider those standing before the throne. If there was a pre-tribulation rapture before the Antichrist came on the scene at the start of the seven-year period, why do we not see the pre-tribulation saints welcoming the great multitude? We read of the Lamb, the angels, the elders, and the four living creatures standing around the throne, and God Himself seated on the throne, but no sign of any pre-tribulation believers in the welcome party (Revelation 7:9-14). We don't see any pre-tribulation believers welcoming the great multitude because there is only one rapture, and it takes place at the time we read in this passage, just after the cosmic signs that Jesus spoke about. Instead of the Church thinking we are not going to see any hardship or tribulation, we should prepare our hearts to endure distress and persecution. Persecution has always been the experience of those who follow Christ. (John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12). The intensity of the final conflict of righteousness and evil will rise in the last days, but we have seen the persecution of the Lord's church throughout all of Church history. The Ten Virgins Parable is clearly telling us that the five foolish virgins did not get to come in after God shut the door. I don't hear of Jesus whispering to the five foolish virgins to come back later and that He would let them in. No, dear friends, the Scripture tells us that the door was shut, and the pleas of the five foolish to get into the marriage supper were not granted when they tried to get in later (Matthew 25:10).

We see those who have gone through the Great Tribulation (*Distress*, NIV) getting the opportunity to serve God day and night in His temple, and that God will spread his tent over them: **“the One seated on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them” (v. 15)**. If you've ever been to a Jewish wedding you'll see the bride and groom being married under a hoopah (chuppah), a canopy symbolizing being under God's love and protection—His tent (a picture of marriage, Ruth 3:9). God Himself will wipe away their tears and pain (Revelation 7:13-17). The word "Amen!" was spoken by the angels in verse eleven. *Amen* is a word that means "let it be" or "so be it."

How Was this Great Multitude Gathered to Heaven?

Some believe that the great multitude of people is martyred during the Great Tribulation or Distress time, but we should always let the Scripture interpret itself. As we've said, both Matthew and Mark's Gospels say explicitly that these are gathered into heaven by the angels in what today we call the rapture (Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27). The word *rapture* is not a word in the Bible; we use the word to describe the true Church, those born again of God, being caught up to heaven. The English word comes from the Latin word *rapere*, meaning *rapid*. The Latin infinitive *rapere* is from the original Greek word *harpazō*, translated as “caught up” in the New International Version and King James Bible (1 Thessalonians 4:17). *Harpazō* means: “to strip, spoil, snatch. To seize upon with force or to rob. It is an open act of confiscatory violence...to snatch or tear away, yank away, pluck out of, remove by swiftly and aggressively grasping.”²

Let's examine this event on God's timetable more closely:

² *Key Word Study Bible*. AMG Publishers. 773 Harpazō.

First, let's examine together 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and we will see what the Apostle Paul has to say about the rapture or being *caught up*:

¹³Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For **the Lord Himself will come down from heaven**, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Emphasis added).

Three times in the passage above, Paul writes about those who have fallen asleep. He's talking about Christians who have died. When those trusting Christ die, their body may be in the grave, but the person, i.e., their spirit, goes on to be with the Lord; so, in a sense, he never dies (John 11:11-14). Scripture refers to them as being "asleep." When Christ comes down from heaven, verse 14 tells us that He will bring with Him the spirits of the departed believers that are with Him in heaven. Their resurrection bodies will rise first before those who are alive and remain on earth are caught up also to be with the Lord. The phrase *caught up* in verse 17 is the Greek word, *harpazō*, from which we get the word "rapture." Paul the Apostle wrote to the Corinthian church: "In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

How Will We Be Changed at the Rapture?

When Christ returns at the rapture, those who have previously fallen asleep (died in Christ) will come with the Lord, have their bodies raised from the grave, and be reunited with their spirits in the air.

²⁸"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29).

This event is called the resurrection of the dead or the first resurrection. There are two resurrections. The first will be at the rapture, where the dead in Christ will rise first. Those who are still alive on earth will also go up to meet the Lord in the air with a new body. This body will be a glorious body into which we change "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:42); how blessed will be those who experience this rapture or resurrection!

⁴I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with**

Christ a thousand years. ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-5).

The second resurrection is one of judgment for those who reject God's offer of a free pardon through Jesus and will occur after the thousand-year millennial reign of Christ at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:7-12). Daniel the Prophet also writes about the dead being raised:

¹“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. **²Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.** ³Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge” (Daniel 12:1-4).

At the first resurrection or rapture, the saints are clothed with a resurrection body similar to Christ's resurrection body. There will be some continuity in that we will be recognizable, but we are talking about an imperishable body, i.e., a body raised with the glory of God shining from us. Paul writes that we will not all go through the experience of death, but all believers will be changed:

⁴⁹And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, **so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.** ⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but **we will all be changed**— ⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and **we will be changed.** ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:49-53).

Which sentences stand out to you from this passage? What do you think it means to “be changed?” What does this passage teach us about our new body? (1 Corinthians 15:42).

That which is on the inside, your godly character, will someday be revealed. It won't be the same as our old nature; Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (v. 50). It will no longer be perishable but imperishable (v. 53). We won't all sleep, i.e., not all Christians will be separated from their bodies. Some are transformed instantly without going through the death process. When Christ comes, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, or the time it takes to bat your eyes, we will be changed from having a perishable body to being clothed with an imperishable body (vv. 51-52). Paul speaks of this transformation in his letter to the church at Philippi:

²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body** (Philippians 3:20-21 Emphasis mine).

This Greek word translated to our English word *transform* (v. 21) is the word *Metaschēmatizō*. It is a construction of two Greek words. *Meta* means a change of place or condition, and *schēma* implies shape or outward form, i.e., to transform, change the outer form or appearance of something, refashion, or reshape.³

An imperishable body means that we won't age or get sick. Our new bodies will be glorious all of the time. You will always have youthful strength and be radiantly beautiful with God's glory radiating from you. Just as Jesus walked through walls into the upper room when the door was locked for fear of the Jews (John 20:19), we will also pass through walls and travel instantaneously, not bound by the physical realm with interesting implications. How wonderful to say to your spouse, let's have dinner in Florence, Italy, tonight, and instantly be there.

Paul wrote that our new body would be like Christ's glorious body (Philippians 3:21). This radiance that accompanies us will be both authoritative and beautiful. Jesus said, "**The righteous will *shine like the sun* in the kingdom of their father**" (Matthew 13:43, Emphasis added). Those who belong to Christ will command respect born of wisdom from above. There will be kindness and joy that will be ours. It will also be a powerful body (1 Corinthians 15:43). I don't think this speaks only of strength, although that will be part of it. There will be power and authority, for we will be like Him when we see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). Our bodies will be raised, and we will see the face of Jesus and be transformed into His image. Oh, what a day that will be!

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your wonderful grace and mercy in sending Your Son, the Lord Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sin and for buying us out of Satan's clutches. We long for the day when we will stand before You as a great multitude from every nation and tribe and people and tongue. Hallelujah! Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

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³ *Key Word Study Bible*. AMG Publishers, Page 1651.