

Revelation 7.9-17

- Salvation belongs to our God -

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Introduction

- ❖ The main message of Revelation 7;9-17 is “Salvation belongs to our God”!
 - Let Revelation 7:9-17 encourage you to stay faithful, steadfast, to pray, to witness the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, doing good works.
 - You are part of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." And: “They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”
 - This salvation implies justification, liberation and restoration. Justification (white robes); liberation (from the great tribulation); restoration (serving God and the Lamb).
 - This salvation is assured: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” (Rev 7:12).
 - This salvation is not offered and realized by other religions, philosophies, or science.

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Revelation to John. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a stand-alone. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ The book of Revelation is like a painting. It is impossible to study one passage without looking at the book as a whole.
- ❖ A brief outline of the Book of Revelation:¹

Introduction (Rev 1:1-3)	
Rev 1:1-3	The origin of and the command to write this Revelation.
The Book of Revelation (Rev 1:4-22:21)	
Rev 1:4-8	The opening liturgical setting.
Rev 1:9-3:22	PART 1
Rev 4:1-22:6	PART 2
Rev 22:7-21	The closing liturgical setting.

- PART 1: The risen and exalted Christ sends his seven messages to the seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia.
- PART 2: The heavenly courtroom and the judgment of God, ending with the descent of the new heaven and earth.
 - PART 2: Three main stages can be distinguished in this part of Revelation. Each stage is introduced by a vision of the heavenly courtroom where God resides as the Creator-King and Judge of all creation.

Part 2 (Rev 4:1-22:11)	
Stage 1	Rev 4:1-7:17 > the first six seals.
Stage 2	Rev 8:1-11:14 > (the seventh seal) and the first six trumpets.
Stage 3	Rev 11:15-22:11 > (the seventh trumpet) and the seven bowls of God's wrath > the two cities: Babylon and the New Jerusalem.

¹ This outline for sermons is brief and does not discuss all the (many) different theories about the structures and outlines of the Book of Revelation. Beale (1999) provides a detailed outline. For discussion see Garrow (1997).

Part 2: Stage 1 (Rev 4:1-7:17) – in more detail	
The heavenly courtroom (Rev 4:1-5:14)	
Rev 4	Praise to the One who sits on the throne in heaven
Rev 5	Worthy is the Lamb to open the scroll
The opening of the first 6 seals (Rev 6:1-7:17)	
Rev 6	<p>The first four seals opened by the Lamb</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev 6:1-8 > The four horses and their riders. <p>The fifth and sixth seals opened by the Lamb contain two outcries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev 6:9-11 > The souls beneath the altar: • "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (verse 10). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A provisional answer is given in Revelation 6:11: "they were told to wait a little longer..." The final answer will be revealed in Revelation 19:11-20:15. • Rev 6:12-17 > The kings of the earth..., every free man: • "They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'" (verse 16, 17).
Rev 7 ²	<p>The second outcry "who can stand" is answered immediately:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev 7:1-8: "the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" (verse 4). • Rev 7:9-17: "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

² Some commentators call Revelation 7 an Interlude. To my opinion, this does not do justice to the relationship which exists between Revelation 6:12-17 and chapter 7.

Structure of Revelation 7

❖ Chapter 7 consists of two visions.

- The first vision (7:1-8) ends abruptly. The hearer/reader might ask: “what will happen to the land, the sea and the trees after the servants of the LORD have been sealed?”
 - The answer to this question is not found in the Revelation, although the land, the seas and the trees are mentioned in Revelation 8:7-8 here the damage is not caused by the wind but by fire (from heaven).
 - This abrupt ending creates tension in the narrative.
- In the second vision, the focus shifts from the 144,000 to the multitude nobody can count. See also below (Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes).

Vision 1: Revelation 7:1-8 - the sealing of the 144,000	
<i>Part 1</i> <i>(verse 1)</i>	After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or the sea or on any tree.
<i>Part 2</i> <i>(verse 2, 3)</i>	Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”
<i>Part 3</i> <i>(verse 4-8)</i>	Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,

from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

An abrupt ending, a gap

Vision 2: Revelation 7:9-17: the salvation belongs to our God

*Part 1:
Salvation
belongs to
our God
(verse 9-12)*

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying:

“Amen!

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever.

Amen!”

*Part 2:
Discourse
(verse 13-17)*

Then one of the elders asked me,

“These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

I answered,

“Sir, you know.”

And he said,

“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre 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."

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

The purpose of Revelation

- ❖ The purpose of the Book of Revelation is fourfold:
 - 1. Revelation: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him **to show his servants what must soon take place**. He made it known" (Rev 1:1).
 - 2. Promise: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to **the tree of life** and may go through the gates into the **city**" (Rev 22:14).
 - 3. Warning: "And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in **the tree of life** and in the **holy city**, which are described in this book" (Rev 22:19).
 - 4. Call: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the **water of life**" (Rev 22:17).

The character of the book

- ❖ The Book of Revelation is **Trinitarian** (God – Holy Spirit – Jesus Christ; Rev. 1:4-5) in character.
 - God is the first and the last (Rev. 1:8) – Jesus Christ is the first and the last (Rev. 1:17).
 - Jesus Christ speaks to the churches (Rev. 2:1-6) and the churches are summoned to listen to what the Spirit (Rev. 2:7) says.
 - Note the Trinitarian character of Rev. 5:
 - God, Creator residing on his throne;
 - The Son, the Lamb, standing in the midst;
 - The seven spirits, sent by the Son to the corners of the earth (East, West, North, South), who is identical to the Holy Spirit of God.
 - In Revelation 7 the focus is on God, and the Lamb.
- ❖ The Book of Revelation is foremost a **liturgical** book with prayers, doxologies, confessions, prophecies and visions. It shows the heavenly liturgy in images and this liturgy affects the history of this world when the plagues of God strike this earth. Rev. 4:11 explains why: "**You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.**"
 - The priority in the life of every human being is: to glorify God.

- This liturgical book reminds us of the liturgy in the tabernacle (especially) and the temple of the Old Testament. This explains the many references to the altars and the priestly appearances of Christ and (some of) his angels, and the elders.
 - Revelation 7:9-17 contains one song of glorification and one acclamation, which is opened and closed by “Amen.”
- ❖ The book of Revelation is also a **prophetic** book about the past, the present and the future. It sheds light on the past, the present situation of the seven churches in Asia Minor, and the future, culminating in the promise of the new heaven and the new earth.
 - From chapter 4 onwards the judgment of God is the dominating theme. He will do justice (Rev. 4-5; Rev. 6:10; **7:9-17**; Rev. 21:1-15 and other passages).

Reading and Understanding

- ❖ Reading and understanding the Book of Revelation requires:
 - Profound knowledge of the Old Testament.
 - Especially the books of Exodus and Numbers, Ezekiel and Daniel are important for study. These books are related to oppression and deliverance of the people of God (Egypt and Babylon). Genesis 2-3 and 1 Kings 6 provide the necessary background for understanding Revelation 21:9-22:5.
 - Knowledge of the Greek-Roman world of the first century.
 - Knowledge of figures of speech, because of all the metaphors and other figures of speech.
 - Knowledge of the structure of Revelation (see above).
 - (Elementary) knowledge of Hermeneutics.

Christ revealed

- ❖ John received this Revelation from Jesus Christ and at the same time, this Revelation reveals the risen and exalted Christ, who holds the keys of (life and) death and Hades (Rev. 1:17). John understood the words he heard, the visions he saw, though sometimes they needed to be explained to him (Rev. 1:19-20).
- ❖ The Lamb (Rev 7:10, 14, 17)
- ❖ **“The lamb” = “ἀρνίον”**: the crucified, resurrected and glorified Christ.
 - The Lamb refers to the Exodus out of Egypt (Ex 12; Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).
 - The Lamb is introduced in Revelation 5:6 “Then I (John) saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne.”
 - “looking as if it had been slain” refers to the crucifixion.
 - “standing” refers to the resurrection

- “in the centre of the throne” refers to glorification.
- The Lamb is worthy to take the scroll (5:1) and to open its seals (Rev 5:5, 9; 6: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1): “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!” (Rev 5:12; 17).
 - This scroll is probably the Book of Life (Rev 3:5; 13: 8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).
- “The Lamb at the centre 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” (Rev 7:17).
 - Those who wear white robes “have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14; see also Rev 12:10).
- The Lamb is victorious: “There before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev 14:1; see also Rev 17:14).
- The church is the bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:9, 21:9, 21:14). After the final judgment, all those whose names were written in the Book of Life will live forever in communion with the Lamb and with God (Rev 21:22, 23).

The church

- ❖ John wrote down what he heard and saw in this book and sent it to the seven churches in Asia Minor, an important province of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In these seven messages to the churches of Asia, Jesus Christ addresses major aspects of church life. He praises and rebukes them and gives them promises of the life to come. Christians, members of these churches, understood these messages. Twice are people mentioned by name and they were warned against a movement called the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6; 2:15), active among the churches. These Christians were far more familiar with the figures of speech used in the Revelation than we are today.
 - Figures of speech are not always understood by 21st-century readers. Sometimes they are explained, more often not. Figures of speech allow more than one explanation and application. That explains the multitude of commentaries and theories.

Hermeneutical traditions

- ❖ In the process of explaining and applying the prophecies of this book, the interpreter should ask himself two questions:
 - To which exegetical tradition do I belong? There are a plethora of traditions, especially in the Anglo-American World. To mention only three:
 - Amillennialism;
 - Postmillennialism;
 - Premillennialism.

- Secondly, the interpreter should be aware of his present situation and the local Christian community. What is my political-religious situation and how does this situation affect my reading and understanding of the Book of Revelation?

Time and space

- ❖ The two visions (Revelation 7:1-8; Revelation 7:9-17) are situated in different spaces and periods. In between, there is a gap in time and space. To make it even more complicated, there is also the timely aspect of communication concerning the hearers and readers of the Revelation. The praises are not only directed towards God and the Lamb, but also to the reader and hearer.

Revelation 7:1-8		(gap)	Revelation 7:9-17		
Space: Earth		-----	Space: Earth	Space: New Heaven and Earth	
Relative Time: Present	Relative Time: (nearby) Future		Relative Time: Past (future)	Relative Time: Present (future)	Relative Time: Future
Four angels standing... (verse 1, 2)	Until we put a seal on... : : (do not) harm the land... (verse 3-8)		They have come out of the great Tribulation.... They have washed their robes (verse 13-14)	A great Multitude... standing before the throne... wearing white robes and holding palm branches (verse 9-12)	They will serve him day and night... For the Lamb will be their shepherd... (verse 15-17)
Discourse: present (the acclamations)					
<p>"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (verse 10)</p> <p>---</p> <p>"Amen!</p> <p>Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever.</p> <p>Amen!" (verse 12)</p>					

- ❖ This chart needs some explanation.

- The aspect of space is clear. Verse 1-8 and 13-14: the actions are located on earth. Verse 9-12 and 15-17: the actions are located in the space of the new heaven and earth.
- The aspect of time is intricate. There are different levels of time.
 - (1) There is the time of reception of the Revelation by John: “I saw”, “I heard”, “I looked” and the discourse with one of the elders.
 - (2) Within both visions time is relatively related to verses 1 and 2, and to the previous level (1). Verses 1 and 2 are descriptive. These verses describe, using metaphors, the present situation of John and the churches. The next verses (3-8) refer to actions in the (nearby?) future. The sealing of the 144,000 precedes harming the earth.
 - **Then there is a gap in space and time.** The visions don’t reveal the actual sealing, nor the release of the four winds. This gap raises expectations. “What will happen next?” The reader doesn’t receive an answer to this question.
 - Suddenly, the vision leaps into the future of the New Heaven and Earth (verse 9-17; Revelation 22:1-5). The elder points to the past of the great tribulation (verse 13-14) on earth. Is this part of the answer to the question: "What will happen?" raised by the gap?
 - Verses 9-12 depict the future present state of the saints.
 - Verses 15-17 proclaim the realised promises of the faithful saints in the future.
 - (3) On the other end, there is the time of reception by the hearer or reader, in the first century C.E. and the 21st century.
 - Especially, the acclamations of praise are not only descriptive, of what John sees and hears, but at the same time they convey the Gospel to the reader and hearer:
 - Verse 9-10: "Salvation belongs to our God". The message to the reader is: Do not seek salvation from anyone else, not from the Roman Emperor, the (Roman) gods, other humans, nor from science.
 - Verse 11-12: "Praise and glory be to our God for ever and ever." The appeal to the reader is: Participate in these praises.
 - Verse 13-14: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation." The message for the reader is: Stay faithful, whatever will happen, and follow in their footsteps. Don't be surprised when the great tribulation comes.
 - Verse 15-17: “Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; (...). And God will wipe away every tear

from their eyes." The message is: These promises are also given to you, reader.

Exposition

The gap (verse 8 // 9)

- ❖ The reader is eagerly waiting for the opening of the seventh seal, which actually will be opened in Revelation 8:1. He has to wait for a moment.
 - Revelation 7:3: "Do not harm **the land or the sea or the trees** until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." **The land, the sea and the trees** will be harmed in Revelation 8:6-9.
 - The sealing itself is not revealed. But, Revelation 9:4 tells the reader: "They (= locusts; 9:3) were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads." This indicates that the sealing has taken place. What happened in between? This question remains open.
 - A possible answer can be found in Revelation 12-14. In Revelation 14:1, the 144,000 stand amidst the four living creatures and elders singing a new song. Revelation 14:1-5 is a heavenly vision, whereas Revelation 7:1-8 focuses on the earth.
 - In Revelation 12-13, the world is warned:
 - "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Rev 12:12). Does the great tribulation (Rev 7:14) point to this time, which is short?
- ❖ A better solution seems to be, to leave the gap open, and not to search for a definite answer(s).
 - The main message of the gap is: "Salvation belongs to our God.. and to the Lamb," whatever will happen, even when the great tribulation will befall the saints.

Verse 9-12

- ❖ **"After this I looked."** This vision points to the future and will be more fully revealed in Revelation 21:4, 6 and 22:1-5. This vision shows what will take place in heaven, whereas the initial vision shows what will take place on earth. See above: "time and space."
- ❖ **"there before me was a great multitude that no one could count"** Note the contrast with the previous vision: **144,000** sealed from all tribes of Israel (Rev 7:4). With emphasis.
 - **"from every nation, tribe, people and language."** Note the four words used to describe the origins of the saints. Many nations, tribes, peoples and languages lived within the

boundaries of the Roman Empire and beyond, “to indicate the whole human race.”³ “**Nation**” is used in reference to all nations including the Jews.⁴

- “a great multitude” “evokes the promise to Abraham and Jacob that God would multiply their descendants”⁵ (See Gen 17:4-6; 16:10; 32:12; see also Mt 28:19).

- These are not all martyrs (Rev 6:9) but all suffer the “the great tribulation.”
- This vision must have been impressive for those who belong to often very small churches, then and now.

❖ **“standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”**

- **“standing before the throne”** They have received **“grace and peace”** (Rev 1:4) and **“are worthy”** (Rev 3:4) to stand before the throne (Rev 4) and **“in front of the Lamb”** (Rev 5).
 - Compare this with: “I saw **under the altar the souls** of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (Rev 6:9). Standing before the throne implies also their vindication.
 - Compare with Revelation 6:15-17: “Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and **who is able to stand?**” The answer is given here.
- **“white robes”**: see also Revelation **3:4, 5**; 3:18; 6:11; 7:13, 14; 22:14. They are **their** robes, not new robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb.
 - The twenty-four elders are also dressed in white (Rev 4:4).
- **“holding palm branches.”** This is a sign of joy and victory. Possibly, it is a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:40-43), remembering the wanderings through the wilderness, the Exodus (see below).

❖ **“And they cried out in a loud voice.”** This is not only descriptive but also an overwhelmingly loud call to everyone who listens to the reading of this book.

- Because this vision reveals the end of history, **“the multitude”** says also to the Christians who struggle to stay faithful: “be assured, we know by experience.” It is therefore a call “for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints” (Rev 13:10).

³ Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993, p. 126).

⁴ Christensen, D. L. (1992, Vol. 4, p. 1037). *Nations*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

⁵ Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 426).

- ❖ **“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”** This is the main message of the vision!
 - Salvation does not belong to the (Roman, Greek and other so-called gods). Salvation does not belong to the Roman Emperor, the city of Rome, and the Roman Empire. Only God and the Lamb can save.
 - Salvation is secured by "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14). Salvation aims at the justification of the sinner not by works but by faith (Eph 2:8).
 - Salvation implies liberation from tribulation (Rev 7:14), slavery (Ex 20:1), suffering (Rev 1:9; 2:10), and persecution (Rev 2:4). It “is not exclusively a religious term but is closely associated with eschatological victory in Revelation and refers here to salvation in the sense of “deliverance” or “victory” over persecution.”⁶
 - Salvation leads to comfort, a new creation, a new life (Rev 7:16, 17; Rev 21:4-6; 22:1-5).
 - For the **“Lamb”** see above.
- ❖ **“All the angels...”** Angels are the envoys of God. The elders represent the heavenly courtroom. The four living creatures represent the living creation. See Revelation 4 and 5:11.
- ❖ **“They fell down...”**
 - **“fell down”** is a sign of awe and respect.
 - **“worship”**. Note again the liturgical character of the Revelation (Rev 4:10; 5:14; 11:16; 15:4; 19:4).
- ❖ **“Amen!”**
- ❖ **Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever.**
- ❖ **Amen!”**
 - This song of praise or acclamation must be seen against the background of the religious and political situation of the Roman Empire, where the Emperor was claiming praise, honour and strength.
 - This acclamation opens and ends with “Amen!”
 - The acclamation contains seven praises, indicating the glorious fulness. **See also Revelation 5:12.**

⁶ Aune, D. E. (1998, Vol. 52B, p. 470).

- “praise” = “εὐλογία”: 1. **act of speaking in favourable terms, praise.**⁷ Many Psalms are songs of praise. Psalm 103 is an example.
- “glory” = “δόξα”: 1. **the condition of being bright or shining, brightness, splendour, radiance.**⁸ 3. **honour as enhancement or recognition of status or performance, fame, recognition, renown, honour, prestige.**⁹
- “wisdom” = “σοφία”: godly wisdom. Although man cannot understand God’s wisdom, God’s wisdom is trustworthy. See Romans 11:33-26.
- “thanks” = “εὐχαριστία”: 2. **the expression or content of gratitude, the rendering of thanks, thanksgiving**¹⁰
- “honour” = “τιμή”: 2. **manifestation of esteem, honour, reverence.**¹¹
- “power” = “δύναμις”: 1. **potential for functioning in some way, power, might, strength, force, capability.**¹²
- “strength” = “ἰσχύς”: **capability to function effectively, strength, power, might.**¹³

suggested structure of this song of praise	
“Amen!	
Praise and glory	Theme = praise
and wisdom and thanks and honor	Theme = wisdom, thanks and honor
and power and strength	Theme = power
be to our God for ever and ever.	

⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 408).

⁸ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 257).

⁹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 257).

¹⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 416).

¹¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1005).

¹² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 262).

¹³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 484).

Amen!"

- With this acclamation or song of praise, the first part of the vision ends.

Verse 13-17 (discourse)

❖ **“Then one of the elders asked me”**

- This elder belongs to the twenty-four who are mentioned together with the four living creatures (Rev 4:4, 10; 5:6).
 - The four living creatures represent the living creation.
 - The twenty-four elders represent the servants of God (Rev 5:8, 14) and have a role in the heavenly courtroom.
 - They worship God and the Lamb (Rev 4:10; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4).
- Here and in Revelation 5:5, one of these elders is communicating with John.
- He is asking a question, John cannot answer. This is a manner of evoking interest.

❖ **“These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”**

- **“white robes”** – this is proof of justification. See above and also Revelation 3:4, 5, (18); 6:9.
 - Being clothed in a white robe implies admittance into the presence of the Holy One. Barclay remarks: “Here is a picture which is present all through Scripture, of those who have stained their garments with sin and who have been cleansed by the grace of God. It is of the greatest importance to remember that this love of God does not only forgive people their stained garments, it makes them clean.”¹⁴
- There are two questions (Q), and the answers (A) are given in verse 14:
 - (1)(Q) **“who are they?”** – (A) **“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”**
 - (2) (Q) **“where did they come from?”** – (A) **“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.”**
 - John already knew that they came **“from every nation, tribe, people and language.”** This is an answer from geography. The elder answers history: **“the great tribulation.”**

¹⁴ Barclay, W. (2004, Vol. 2, p. 34).

- John received the Revelation within the context of the Roman Empire. His readers must have understood “**the great tribulation**” within this context. See also Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21. Within the context of this outline, there is, unfortunately, no room to discuss “the great tribulation” in detail.¹⁵
- ❖ “**I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’**” Please, tell me, because I don’t know.
- ❖ “**These are they who have come out**”: the verb “to come out (of)” has the meaning “to survive,” “to live through,” or “pass through ... safely.”¹⁶ They have experienced that “salvation belongs to God!”
 - Barclay remarks: “It is not a deliverance which saves people from trouble but one which brings them triumphantly through trouble. It does not make life easy, but it makes life great. It is not part of the Christian hope to look for a life in which we are saved from all trouble and distress; the Christian hope is that in Christ we can endure any kind of trouble and distress, remain upright throughout, and come out to glory on the other side.”¹⁷
- ❖ “**The great tribulation.**” What will happen, when and where? The answer to this question depends on the hermeneutical position of the reader. See above.
 - Beale comments: “Therefore, the tribulation consists of pressures to compromise faith, these pressures coming both from within the church community through seductive teaching and from without through overt oppression.”¹⁸ This is based on the warnings found in the seven messages to the churches (Rev 2-3). **GAP**
 - “Whatever its nature, tribulation always comes because of believers’ faithful witness to Jesus.”¹⁹ The great tribulation will separate the faithful from the unfaithful (Rev 21:8; 22:11-19).
 - “The great tribulation” will cause hunger and thirst, heat and tears (Rev 7:16, 17; see below).

¹⁵ The context of Matthew 24:21 shows that “the tribulation” is severe but local (Judea) and there are safe havens in the mountains (Mt 24:15, 16).

¹⁶ Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993, p. 129).

¹⁷ Barclay, W. (2004, Vol. 2, p. 31).

¹⁸ Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 433-434).

¹⁹ Beale, G. K. (1999, p. 434).

- “They overcame him (satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” See for “him who overcomes”: Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7.
- ❖ **“They have washed their robes and made them white.”** They didn't receive new clothes but washed them in the blood of the Lamb. This is a symbolic and spiritual washing.
 - **“the blood of the Lamb.”** “To him who loves us and **has freed us from our sins by his blood**” (Rev 1:5) “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne” (Rev 5:6) and “because you were slain, and **with your blood you purchased men for God**” (Rev 5:9).
 - This is also an implicit exhortation to stay faithful: **“Blessed are those who wash their robes**, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22:14).
- ❖ **“Therefore, they are before the throne of God.”** This is the de conclusion of the preceding verses. Glory be to Christ Jesus: “To him who (...) **has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**” (Rev 1:5, 6).
- ❖ **“and serve him day and night in his temple”**
 - **“temple.”** This is not a physical building. But with the Old Testament in mind, a symbol for living in the presence of God (Rev 21:22).
 - **“day and night”** means continuously. but Revelation 22:5 reveals: “There will be no more night.”
 - serve = **“λατρεύω”**: carrying out of religious duties,²⁰ “worship”.
 - This service was foreshadowed in the Old Testament by the tabernacle (Heb 8:5) and temple, and in the New Testament era by the church services.
 - “Then a voice came from the throne, saying: ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!’” (Rev 19:5).
- ❖ **“he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.”** Tent refers to the tabernacle (Ex 25-50; Rev 15:5) and is part of the Exodus-theme²¹. See chart.

Theme	Exodus
Blood of the Lamb	Exodus 12:1-13 Christ: 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 1:5b-6

²⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 587).

²¹ The Revelation seems to be a New Testament Exodus.

Blood of the covenant	Exodus 24:8 Blood of the new covenant Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; 1 Cor 11:25 – the Passover.
Blood of atonement	Exodus 30:10
Blood of consecration (service as priests)	Exodus 29
Hunger and thirst	Exodus 16:1-17:8
Sun	Exodus 16:21 (See also Ps 121:5, 6; and Isaiah 49:6!)
Tent (of Meeting) ²²	Exodus 25-50 (See also Ezek 37:27)
Serve "To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father" (Rev 1:5, 6a).	Exodus 19:6 (1 Pet 2:9) but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation."
Desert as a place of refuge	Exodus 16-19; Revelation 12

- ❖ **“Never again will they hunger (...) The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.”**
 - It seems to be that these sufferings are caused by the great tribulation because Christians had to flee into the wilderness (Rev 12).
- ❖ **“For the Lamb at the centre of the throne”** strongly asserts the redemptive work of Christ again and again (Rev 5). He will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."Shepherd" See also John 10; Psalm 23.
 - The Lamb becomes the Shepherd.
- ❖ **“Springs of living water.”** See Revelation 21:6; 22:1, 17 and also Genesis 2:10-14. See also Isaiah 49:10, the return from exile.
- ❖ **“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** God is “a tender and compassionate God who will set the world right side up.”²³ There will be no more grief because of loss.

²² Thomas, J. C., & Macchia, F. D. (2016, p. 173).

²³ Resseguie, J. L. (2009, p. 140).

Application

Several sermons

- ❖ Focus on Revelation 7:9-10: Salvation belongs to the Lord – a great multitude – justified by faith.
- ❖ Focus on Revelation 7:11-12: Salvation belongs to the Lord – praise for his glory, wisdom and strength in saving this multitude.
- ❖ Focus on Revelation 7:13-14: Salvation belongs to the Lord – (a great multitude) is saved through the great tribulation – by the blood of the Lamb.
- ❖ Focus on Revelation 7:15-17: Salvation belongs to the Lord – saved to serve the Lord – to live forever – tears will be dried.

The purpose of Revelation

- ❖ Explain the purpose of Revelation:
 - The glorification of God and the Lamb. To worship God. See also Revelation 1:6. The heavenly worship and the earthly worship coincide.
 - A call to Christians, especially those who suffer persecution and oppression, to be faithful. See also Revelation 22:17.
- ❖ Remark: Revelation doesn't inform us in detail about "the great tribulation." The preacher must refrain from speculations!

Glorify

- ❖ God as Creator-King-Judge and Saviour. Especially the song of glorification (Rev 7:12).
 - Pay special attention to the wisdom of God, which surpasses all human wisdom and understanding.
- ❖ Christ as the Lamb. He gave his life. He is the Good Shepherd.

Verse 9-12

- ❖ The multitude saved consists of
 - "the Church Militant, also called the Church Pilgrim which consists of Christians on earth who struggle as soldiers of Christ against sin, the devil, and 'the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places' (Eph 10:11-17);
 - the Church Triumphant, which consists of those who have the beatific vision and are in Heaven."²⁴

²⁴ Wikimedia Foundation. (2022, April 27). Churches Militant, penitent, and triumphant. Wikipedia. Retrieved July 6, 2022, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Churches_Militant,_Penitent,_and_Triumphant

- The multitude celebrates the victory of the Lamb.

❖ Worship (1):

- Salvation belongs to our God, and not to any other religion, philosophy, nor science.
- Explain how other religions, philosophies, and scientific efforts and unmask their claims.
- Salvation means forgiveness of sins, liberation from slavery, oppression, persecution, and ultimately restoration and renewal to serve God.

❖ Worship (2):

- Pay attention to the wisdom of God and his strength. The Wisdom of God is not like the wisdom of this world. He is the Alpha and Omega.
 - These virtues are also given to men (see below).

Verse 13-14

❖ “The Great tribulation”

- Patterson remarks: “By way of practical application, every believer should note that what is presented to the eye in this passage is the promise of God—not for ultimate intervention in the present age but for perfect intervention in the age to come. The Bible makes clear that all will have tribulation and that all the godly in Christ will suffer.”²⁵ See also Romans 8:17, 18.
- Refrain from speculations. The Revelation doesn’t explain to which times and circumstances “the great tribulation” refers.

❖ “white in the blood of the Lamb”

- The power of the cross of Christ!
 - (1) This work of Christ has something to do with the past. It wins for men and women forgiveness for past sins and liberates them from their slavery to sin. (2) This work of Christ has something to do with the present. It gives people here and now, upon earth, in spite of failure and of sin, a new and intimate relationship with God, in which fear has gone and in which love is the bond.
 - (3) This work of Christ has something to do with the future. It frees people from the power of evil and enables them to live a new life in the time to come.”²⁶

²⁵ Patterson, P. (2012, Vol. 39, p. 205).

²⁶ Barclay, W. (2004, Vol. 2, p. 36).

Verse 15-17

- ❖ The future promises.

Quotations from Ancient Commentaries

- ❖ CAESARIUS OF ARLES: “He did not say, ‘After this I saw another people,’ but ‘I saw a people,’ that is, the same people that he had seen in the mystery of the 144,000, which he now sees as without number from every tribe and tongue and nation. For by believing, all nations have been engrafted into the root. In the Gospel the Lord showed forth in the [figure of the] twelve tribes the whole church both from the Jews and from the Gentiles. He said, ‘You will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’” EXPOSITION ON THE APOCALYPSE 7:9, HOMILY 6.²⁷
- ❖ PRIMASIUS: Whatever this multitude might be, by expressing these names he indicates the universal church.... Through the naming of these seven virtues, we are exhorted to inquire after the reason why he named those things here in which God desires his church to participate. **It is for this reason, that when these [virtues] are given to God in praise, they might confess that they have received each of them from him.** For we ought not consider that God alone is capable of the [virtues] named here, but that he has found them worthy also to give to the faithful. We rejoice that the church of Christ is allowed to participate in all of these good things: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might. It does not mention omnipotence or majesty or eternity, for God alone always rightly possesses these things. But in these seven we recognize all those virtues that could be granted to the faithful from him who gave them power to become sons of God. And so, if we have acquired any of these good things, we shall know with certainty that we have them by the generosity of God. COMMENTARY ON THE APOCALYPSE 7:11–12.²⁸



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²⁷ Weinrich, W. C., Ed. (2005, p. 111).

²⁸ Weinrich, W. C., Ed. (2005, p. 113).

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