

Revelation 7 - The Church of Christ - Ezekiel 9:3b-6

Where does this chapter fit in the Book of Revelation? It is a response to the question that is asked in the last verse of the previous chapter: 'Who can stand (in the tribulation of the times)?' (6:17). Before the seventh and final seal is opened, John gets an answer: it is the believers, the church of Christ, who can stand. So this chapter is about the identity and future of the Church. This chapter is an intermezzo in the proceedings. The sermon looks at it in three parts.

1 Verses 1-8

Who are these 144,000 and what is the sealing? Are the Jehovah's Witnesses right? No, they are not. Many of the numbers in Revelation have a symbolic meaning:

- The number 3 refers to God
- The number 4 symbolises the earth (which was said to have four corners)
- The number 7 combines 3 and 4, so indicates fullness, completeness
- The number 12 also combines 3 and 4, so likewise points to completeness
- The number 1000 is a very large number
- So 12,000 is a large complete group, and 12 times 12,000 (= 144,000) is a very complete large group.

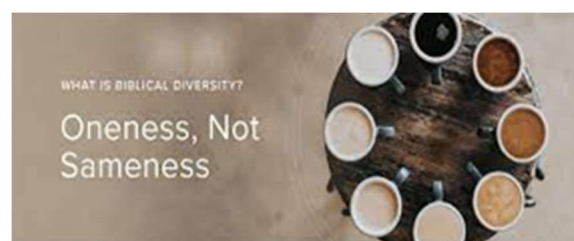
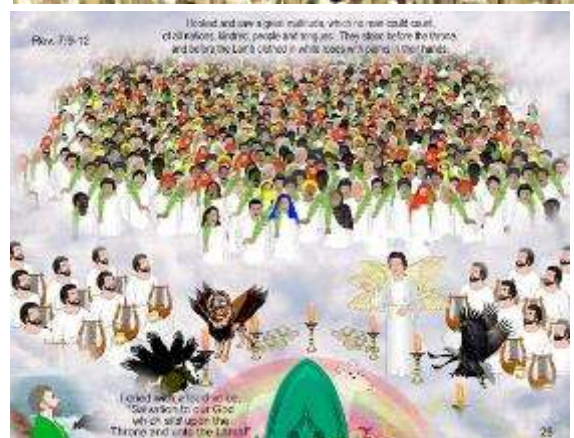
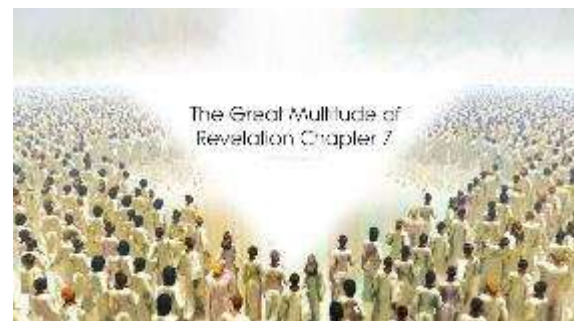
The sealing which takes place here is taken from Ezekiel 9: God's mark protects the believers. The seal or mark indicates God's ownership, approval; so the passage says that there will be persecution by unbelievers (see 6:9-11), but that believers will not suffer from the wrath of God. In fact nothing can separate us from the love of God!

So the 144,000 represent the believers, the church of God, a large group protected by God.

2 Verses 9-17 [slides 1-2]

In verse 9 John sees a countless multitude. This is tremendous because John can count up to millions (5:11)! This is how large the church will become. In John's time there were probably fewer than 100,000 Christians, so this is a tremendous prophecy which has since been fulfilled. The church will no longer be just Jews and Romans, but it will come to include people from all over the world, all ethnicities! These believers are at home with God, safe and well. Their enormous number fulfils the promises to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the sand of the sea.

All of this is the result of the work of Jesus! Verse 14 describes this in an astonishing way: our white robes have been washed white in a red substance, the blood of Jesus! You may be familiar with the expression, but think about it: It surely goes against the logic of all housewives and househusbands. Try making something white in blood! The forgiveness of our sins is miraculous. Jesus also removes the barriers between ethnic groups. When you look around you in the church you can already see a little bit of what it means 'From all tribes and nations and peoples'. [slide 3]



3 Both parts of the chapter together

Revelation 7 says that the church of Christ will no longer be merely Jewish – although the Jews are still the core of it, see Romans 11 and Ephesians 2:11-14 and the olive tree [slide 4].

How am I so sure that the 144,000 and the multitude that no-one can count are the same? Because John does here what he does in other places as well [slide 6]: he tells us that he hears something, then that he sees something else – but these two are the same, seen in a different perspective:

John hears John sees

lion (5:5) lamb (5:6)

bride (21:9) city (21:10)

144,000 (7:4-8) large multitude (7:9)

This means that we believers are both the redeemed of the Lord, safe from his wrath, and the worldwide followers of the Lamb. We carry his seal of ownership and protection. There may be suffering in history, but it is certain that we will safely reach the end.

From every nation, tribe, people...



Olive Tree with Grafts