

What is the Gospel?

Good News in Revelation: God's Vision of visions (Revelation 7:9 – 17)

A vision is a compelling picture of the future that inspires people to do whatever it takes to make the dream a reality. These days many companies and organisations have vision statements. But the book of Revelation can truly be called 'The Vision of visions' because it is God's final Biblical Revelation to humanity regarding his heavenly Kingdom that will finally be established on earth forever.

In Revelation 7:9 - 17 the Apostle John (who wrote down 'The Revelation') describes an outstanding vision within the larger revelation that God showed him. This particular vision begins with one of John's repeated phrases, "*After this I looked (and saw)...*" (7:9). John uses this phrase when presenting his readers with some new aspect of God's overall revelation (e.g. 4:1; 5:1; 7:1...). But we need to understand that Revelation isn't really arranged chronologically. Instead, John's cyclical outline is more like groups of repetitive concentric circles on a target that spiral inward toward the ultimate goal. Thus Revelation 7 gives us a wonderful preview of what Christ's Kingdom will finally look like, even before we reach the glorious final visions of Revelation in chapters 21 - 22. Read Revelation 7:9 – 17 and answer the following questions.

1. Who are the multitude being described in Revelation 7:9, 13 – 14?
2. What do the white robes symbolise in 7:9 & 14?
3. What do the palm branches and the cries of, 'Hosanna' call to mind? (Compare John's Revelation (7:9 – 10) to John's gospel (12:12 – 16))
4. Why is it significant that this human congregation is joined in their worship by angels and the four living creatures? (See Revelation 4:6 – 7 and 5:13 - 14)
5. Visions exist to inspire us. How does this vision inspire you?

(Over the page is a document called, 'The Book of Revelation on a Page' that will help you understand Revelation 7 in its wider context)

The Book of Revelation on a Page

Introduction: It's the nature of a surprise gift to be kept hidden until the proper time. But Jesus teaches us that hidden things are meant to be brought out into the open and concealed things are meant to be revealed (*Mark 4:22*). ***'The Revelation of Jesus Christ'*** is found at the end of our Bible because the mysteries of God's word that were concealed through ages past have finally been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. This vision was first given to the Apostle John and it so overwhelmed him that it's more accurate to say, *'A vision overcame John'* rather than, *'John had a vision'*. May this same Revelation that John experienced also captivate and inspire us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Revelation 1 – 3: Revelation begins with a glorious description of the risen Christ as he walks amongst seven lamp stands while holding seven stars in his hand. The lamp stands represent seven churches in first century Asia, to whom Christ instructed John to write. The seven stars represent the angels that God assigned to watch over his churches (Christ is King of heaven and earth). At the time that John addressed these churches, some were thriving, some were suffering persecution, and some were becoming worldly. Christ's seven letters remind believers in every age to stay alert and keep persevering to the very end.

Revelation 4 – 5: John looked up from the earth and saw an open doorway into heaven. Then he heard Christ's invitation to, *"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place."* Suddenly John found himself in the throne room of God, surrounded by wonderful things that humans aren't usually permitted to see (yet God has revealed them to us). John approached God's throne and was handed a scroll sealed with seven seals. The scroll is God's word, which reveals to us the mysteries of the ages. But no one could be found who could open the scroll and reveal its contents. Therefore, John wept until he was told that The Lion of Judah could break the scroll's seven seals. As John looked to behold the lion, he saw instead a sacrificial lamb, ruling from the throne of God. This Lion/Lamb is Jesus: Our Sacrificed King. Jesus opens God's word for us because he is himself 'The Word of God'

Revelation 6 – 18: As Christ opened the first four seals, four horses and their riders appeared. The first rider charged out to conquer the world. The second rode forth to take peace from the earth. The third declared that a mere litre of barley would cost a day's wage. The fourth rider was named 'Death', and he brought the grave with him. These horsemen remind us of Christ's warning that wars, poverty, hunger, persecution and death will continue to ravage the earth until Christ returns. As the fifth seal was broken John heard the souls of Christian martyrs crying out, *"How much longer Sovereign Lord?"* Then the sixth seal was broken and there was a mighty earthquake, the sun turned black and the moon blood red and the sky was rolled up like a scroll. When the seventh seal was broken similar cycles of these apocalyptic events continued to plague the earth. Sometimes it seems like this great tribulation will never end. During this time John was allowed to look behind the scenes of human history and see Satan, the ancient dragon, waging war against God's people through all these circumstances. However, John was also shown how God will keep his children safe from their foes by placing his seal upon us. This seal is reminiscent of the blood of the Passover lamb that saved Israel from God's final plague on Egypt. But now it's the blood of The Lamb of God that finally saves us from death and judgement. Therefore John saw this great multitude, from every nation on earth, gathered around God's throne to worship him.

Revelation 19 – 22: Finally John saw a rider on a white horse bursting through the clouds of heaven. Across his royal robe was written, *'King of kings and Lord of lords'*. Hundreds of millions of God's heavenly hosts came thundering behind him. John watched as Christ crushed all rebellion, defeated sin and death and made all creation new again. Then Christ consummated the marriage of heaven and earth, declaring, *"God's eternal home is now with humanity!"* To this John cries out, *"Come, Lord Jesus!"* Amen.