

God's people
protected

(i) They are the
servants of God

(ii) They are God's
true Israel

(iii) They are the
saved ones

(iv) They are
worshippers

(v) They are
people who have
experienced
tribulation

Revelation 7:1–17 describes the protection of the people of God before the vision of the final judgement in 8:1. The question is being asked: who are these people? Even the angels ask this question^{□1}. Who are the people who will be in God's final glory? (i) They are the servants of God^{□2}. (ii) They are God's true Israel, the 'seed of Abraham'. They are the modern form of the 'twelve tribes of Israel'^{□3}, now gathered from every people of the world.

It is quite clear that there is only one group of people here, not two. The 144,000 and the multitude that no one can number are the same people. They are not ethnic Israelites. They are not those who are saved at Christ's coming. They are not a remnant of Jews during a tribulation period after the rapture (an idea which has to read far too much into the text). They are rather the one-and-only total church of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's restructured Israel.

(iii) **They are the saved ones.**

They were wearing white robes, and they had palms in their hands. ¹⁰They were crying out with a loud voice,

*'Salvation belongs to our God
who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'*

The white robes represent purity. They have overcome their sins and so have 'washed their robes' clean. They have persevered to the end and now are rejoicing that God has brought them to final victory.

(iv) **They are worshippers.**

¹¹All the angels were standing around the throne, and around the elders and the four living beings. They fell down on their faces before the throne, and worshipped God.

*¹²They were saying,
'Amen.
Blessing, and glory,
and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour,
and power, and might,
be to our God for ever and ever. Amen.'*

These people are enjoying mixing their praises with the praises of the inhabitants of heaven. The elders are angels, but they represent the entire people of God. The living beings are angels representing creation.

(v) **They are people who have experienced tribulation.** John says: ¹³*And one of the elders spoke to me, saying, 'These people clothed in white robes, who are they? Where do they come from?'* ¹⁴*I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one who knows.'* And he said to me, *'These are the people who have come out of the great distress, and they washed their robes, and made them white by means of the blood of the Lamb.'* The redeemed 'have come out of great distress'. In the book of Revelation **all** Christians are people who experience tribulation. Every Christian has to 'overcome' and only 'overcomers' get to the fullness of their final reward. The Christians of Roman Asia Minor were already in great tribulation. The Bible tells us very little about what happens to Christians who do **not** overcome, and the book of Revelation has little interest in them. The prediction of a time of great distress goes back to Daniel 12:1 ('There will be a time of distress such as has never happened since nations first came into existence'). From Daniel's viewpoint it would be at some undefined time a long way ahead. Daniel 12:1 predicted severe persecution at some time within the gospel-age. The book of Revelation also predicts a period of very intense conflict as the gospel is being proclaimed – as we shall see. But the 'great tribulation' has many foretastes. All the time it is true to sav. 'In the world you will have tribulation'. All the time Christians have to be

□1 see 7:13

□2 7:3

□3 7:4-9

overcomers. It does not mean that we are being severely persecuted all the time, but all Christians know something of persecution. All Christians are to identify with the people of God who are more severely persecuted than they are experiencing themselves. And some Christians may well lose their lives. All who are in heaven have come out of great tribulation, in one way or another. John was experiencing it in the first century^{□1}.

□1 see 1:9

(vi) *They have washed their robes . . . by means of the blood of the Lamb*

(vi) **They have washed their robes . . . by means of the blood of the Lamb.** It must be noticed that there are two phrases at this point, not one. 'They washed their robes, **and** made them white . . . ' In the Christian gospel there is first a washing, a removal of stains. Then there is something in addition, a positive 'making white' of our clothing. The washing is our first salvation when the stain of our sins is removed^{□1}. But then there is the positive life of godliness which follows.

□1 see Revelation 1:5; Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 1:7

(vii) *They have made their robes white by means of the blood of the Lamb*

(vii) **They have made their robes white by means of the blood of the Lamb.** The positive 'making white' of our clothing refers to the life of overcoming sin and opposition. In Revelation 6:9–11 the overcomers were given white robes. Those who do not witness to Christ have 'soiled their clothes'^{□1}. Those who do not do so will walk with Jesus 'dressed in white, for they are worthy'^{□2}.

□1 3:4
□2 3:4

Reward

Revelation 7:15–17 goes on to speak of the reward of such people. They are close to God. ¹⁵*Because of this they are before the throne of God. They serve him day and night in his temple.* They enjoy God's protection. *He that is sitting on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them.* They are totally satisfied ¹⁶*They shall never again become hungry; they shall never again experience thirst.* After tribulation they are enjoying comfort. *The sun will never again beat down upon them. Nor will they ever again be burned by the heat.* They know the special care of the Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁷*For the Lamb that is at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to fountains of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

• Closeness to God

• Total satisfaction

• Special care

Stunned silence!

Revelation 8:1 closes this section of the book. *Then when the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven for about half an hour.* It is a pity that the chapter division was not put after 8:1. Our chapter-divisions give the impression that the trumpets of 8:2–9:21 and 11:15–19 arise as the seventh seal is opened. This is a false impression. Revelation 8:1 closes the section. Revelation 8:2 starts something new. The seventh seal continues the theme of the sixth^{□1}. John has seen (as the sixth seal was opened) the terrors of the lost. Now there is the final drama. But the scene is not described! The entire universe reacts with stunned silence for half an hour (there is time in heaven!) when the final vision of the last stage of world history is revealed. John is given no more at this point. Fuller visions of the final events will come in Revelation chapters 19–22. The Lord is in his holy temple, acting in judgement. Let all the earth keep silence before him^{□2}!

□1 in 6:12–17

□2 see Habakkuk 2:20

• Fuller visions of final events given later



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