

Revelation 19:3-8

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Another assembly of voices from Heaven celebrates the completeness of the old world's defeat. The corrupted world system which exploited humans and defied God will never return to power. The twenty-four elders, the four living creatures worship God, and many voices like waterfalls and thunder join in by praising God and His rulership. They speak of celebrating the marriage between the Lamb, Jesus, and His bride, the church. There will be a marriage feast, and the saints will be dressed in fine linen made of their righteous acts of obedience.

In the previous section, a great chorus said *Hallelujah*, then praised God for bringing justice upon the earth, and destroying the world system that persecuted God's servants, including putting them to death. Now the chorus speaks again:

And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever."

The *smoke that rises up forever and ever* refers to the *smoke* from the destruction of the world system, which is called "Babylon" and "the great harlot" in chapter 18 (Revelation 18:8-9). That the *smoke* from the destruction is said to rise up *forever and ever* likely indicates that the destruction of this world system is utter and permanent. There will be no future rising again of this world system that was set up in opposition to God's design. No longer will the earth be ruled with a system where the strong exploit the weak.

Next, after these words spoken by a "great multitude" of heavenly beings (Revelation 19:1) we see once again action by the *twenty-four elders*. The *twenty-four elders* are also mentioned in Revelation 4:4,10; 5:8; 11:16. In these verses we learn that the *twenty-four elders* sit on twenty four thrones, and wear golden crowns. They are also clothed in white garments, which indicates they are believers who were faithful witnesses (Revelation 3:5,18). Similar to prior occasions, *the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne*.

In three prior instances the *twenty-four elders* themselves sang songs of praise (Revelation 4:10-11; 5:8-10; 11:16-18). But in this case, they simply validate the saying of the "great multitude" by saying, "*Amen. Hallelujah!*" The word *Amen* is the same in English, Greek, and Hebrew. It is a word of assent and agreement. The *twenty-four elders* agree with the saying of the "great multitude" by saying *Amen* (we agree) and *Hallelujah* (praise God!).

Next *a voice came from the throne*. It appears that either God or another being with authority is something like a choir conductor. The *voice that came from the throne* now says "*Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.*" This is an invitation for all of God's *bond-servants* in heaven to praise God together. This appears to be a sort of heavenly liturgy. Every *bond-servant* is included, from the *small* to the *great*. This makes clear that there will be varying degrees of reward for faithful service for God's children. There will be some believers in heaven who are highly honored, those who are *great*, and some who

will be saved with no reward, those who are “saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15) and those who are *small*.

Notwithstanding, all believers appear to be invited to participate in this worship service. Now John hears the massive congregation, and describes it by saying *Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying,*

Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

This verse is well known in the English-speaking world because of the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s masterpiece work, the “Messiah.” In the King James translation, this verse is rendered “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth,” which is the translation used in the lyrics of Handel’s “Messiah.” At this moment in history, these lyrics will be pronounced by *a great multitude*, with great volume. Perhaps God will again use Mr. Handel’s masterpiece of music for His purposes. Although the word translated *saying* is not generally associated with music, the *sound of many waters* might indicate a form of harmonious melody. Perhaps many melodies in many languages, woven together.

The *Lord our God* has always been *the Almighty*. But God has allowed Satan to reign over the earth, apparently since the fall of humans (John 12:31; 16:11). But at this point in the Revelation, Satan has been thrown down (Revelation 12:10). The world system he leads, which is filled with human exploitation, has been destroyed (Revelation 18:8-9). And God is taking up His reign upon the earth. His will be an administration where love and harmony reigns (i.e. righteousness.) And those who overcome, as Jesus overcame, will share the reign with Jesus (Revelation 3:21, 5:10, 22:5; Romans 8:17b; Hebrews 2:9-10).

This is a mighty cause for rejoicing. No more will the exploitive tyrant Satan reign. Now God will reign, and share His reign with the overcomers who will reign with Him as servant kings that He has appointed (Revelation 3:21). The earth is being restored to what it was intended, and all God’s people are rejoicing together. Importantly, even the believers who are *small*, perhaps those who did not gain the reward of sharing Jesus’s throne with Him, are also rejoicing. They will also benefit from living in a world ruled by faithful servants. This is why the new earth will be a place where righteousness reigns (2 Peter 3:13).

John describes the sound of this great congregation being *like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder*. It seems by John’s use of these illustrations he is telling us that this is unlike anything he has heard before. The *sound of many waters* might be like a roaring waterfall, or crashing waves of the ocean. Since John is exiled on the island of Patmos, perhaps he has heard mighty waves crashing on the shore during a great storm. This would be a sound of multitudes, of many waves crashing. *Mighty peals of thunder* are deafening in their loudness.

The *great multitude* continues its recital, saying:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.

Now, in addition to rejoicing that the reign of Satan and his world system of human exploitation has ended, the *great multitude* begins to *rejoice and be glad* that a *marriage* is afoot. The *marriage* that is in view is the *marriage of the Lamb* to His *bride*. The word translated *Lamb* appears in Revelation twenty nine times. In all but one instance it refers to Jesus Christ. In the lone exception, it is used to describe a beast who serves as a false prophet to the antichrist (Revelation 13:11). Here are a few examples where Jesus is referred to as a *Lamb*:

- “And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain...” (Revelation 5:6).
- “...saying with a loud voice ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing’” (Revelation 5:12).
- “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying,

“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever”
(Revelation 5:13)

His bride who has *made herself ready* refers to the church, as shown in this verse penned by the Apostle Paul:

“...because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”
(Ephesians 5:30-32)

The “church” in Ephesians 5 refers to all who have believed on Jesus Christ, and been born again by grace, through faith (John 3:14-15; Ephesians 2:8-9). We are not told who makes up the *great multitude*, but it could include both angels as well as believers who are a part of the *bride*. It is noteworthy that the *bride* has *made herself ready*. This would indicate that the readiness of the *bride*, which is the church, is made *ready* through making choices to prepare.

We are also told that the new Jerusalem is “made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.” However, the new Jerusalem is not said to be the bride, but rather to be “made ready as a bride” would be made ready (Revelation 21:2). So the emphasis seems to be on the preparations, that the new city will be perfectly prepared for its inhabitants. It seems that the *bride*, which is the church, will dwell in the new Jerusalem with the groom, which is Christ (Revelation 21:3-4, 22:23-27).

The “wedding dress” for the *bride*, which is the church (all believers in Jesus) is made up of their *righteous acts*. The bride of Christ will be the church (all believers) all of whom are *saints*. The word translated *saints* is the Greek word “hagios” which appears 229 times in the New

Testament, and is translated “holy” 161 of the 229 times (KJV). It simply means to be set apart for special service, as in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’s first advent being called the “holy city” because it was set apart to be a place of gathering and worship (Matthew 4:5). Therefore, the *saints* here are simply Jesus’ servants, those who have been set apart to serve Him by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:14-15).

John describes the clothing of the “bride”: *It was given to her (the bride) to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.* The *righteous acts* of the believers in heaven are acts of obedience —choices that believers made while living on earth. God created *righteous acts* for each believer, but left them the choice whether to do them:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
(Ephesians 2:10)

Even though God prepared good works for each believer, He leaves it to each person to decide whether or not to walk in them. It appears that each good work is a righteous action that creates a strand of *fine linen* in heaven, from which to weave a wedding garment. This seems to be symbolic, but it also could be a tangible reward. Jesus spoke a parable of those who tried to attend a wedding feast in His kingdom without the proper garments, and they were not allowed to attend (Matthew 22:14). This is similar to the “sons of the kingdom” who are clearly believers but will not be honored, or even invited to attend the honor banquet when Jesus comes into His kingdom, because they did not demonstrate great faith during their lives on earth (Matthew 8:10-13; 13:38). In that instance, Jesus was complimenting the faith of a Roman centurion, a Gentile, whose great faith would be honored in heaven.

The word translated *fine linen* is “byssinos” and is only found in Revelation. However, this word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to the “fine linen” used to clothe Joseph when he was elevated to be second ruler over Egypt (Genesis 41:42). A form of the word is used to describe the linen used to make the tabernacle (Exodus 26:1). It is also used to describe parts of the garb of Aaron the priest (Exodus 28:8,15,39). Also King David is said to have worn a robe of “byssinos” (1 Chronicles 15:27). So this robe seems to indicate both a royal as well as a priestly station. This is appropriate, since those who overcome as Jesus overcame will gain the reward of sharing His throne/authority, and Jesus has a function as being both king and priest (Revelation 3:21; 1:6; 5:10).

It is interesting that the *saints* who together make up the “bride” are given the garment of *fine linen* to *clothe herself*. Just as God created good works for believers to walk in, God prepares a garment of *fine linen* for the believers to wear. In each case, the believer must take an action in order to gain the benefit. God will provide the garment, each believer will dress themselves.

The good works, or *righteous acts* are any act done for the motivation of pleasing God. Jesus emphasizes this by highlighting rewards for various acts that seem to us trivial:

- The giving of a cup of water, if it is done in His name (Matthew 10:42; Mark 9:41).
- The giving of a tiny amount of money, if it is all you have to give (Mark 12:42-44).

- Being faithful to steward small responsibilities (Matthew 25:21,23,27).

The Apostle Paul made clear that this principle applies to any act, in any sphere of life, that is done with a heart to please God:

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” (Colossians 3:23-24)

The fact that acts that seem trivial to us are great in God’s eyes emphasizes the distinction between what the world system rewards and what God rewards. Since it is clear that the world system will be destroyed, this provides motivation to seek rewards in God’s economy.

The garment of *fine linen* is said to be *bright and clean*. This is a picture of righteousness. This might refer to the fact that now each believer has gone through the judgement seat of Christ and been purified. In the judgment seat of Christ, the image often used is of fire burning away unrighteous acts, and refining righteous acts, to make them pure (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). However, scripture also uses laundering clothes to whiteness as a picture of purification, as in this verse from the Old Testament:

“For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver...” (Malachi 3:2b-3a)

A “fuller” is a launderer. The “sons of Levi” are the priests of God. In the age of the New Testament, each believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and has a priestly function to represent Jesus to those around them. The judgment of Jesus will purify believers and prepare them to be His bride. Those who overcome will also share His reign (Revelation 3:21; Romans 8:17b).

Biblical Text

And a second time they said, “Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.”⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!”⁵ And a voice came from the throne, saying,

“Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.”⁶ Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying,

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”⁸ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, *bright and clean*; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.