

In the Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Greg Stafford takes up the familiar defense of subjects having to do with the use and pronunciation of the divine name, the identity of the biblical God Jah and of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as issues and questions having to do with salvation, God's sovereignty and mankind's "free will." This edition also contains discussions of several controversial issues, including questions related to abortion, a person's sexual orientation, and regarding uses of blood.

Most significantly, this book puts forth not only a defense of some the biblical teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, but it also further introduces the Christian Witnesses of Jah, Jehovah's Witnesses who reject human traditions when these can be shown to contradict what is based on the best available reasons. Thus, a call is made to all Jehovah's Witnesses, to all Christians, indeed, to "every breathing thing" to bear witness to and to praise the biblical God Jah, and to acknowledge what can be shown to be true for good reasons about Jesus of Nazareth.—Psalm 150:6; Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12; Acts 18:24-28; Galatians 1:10; Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

GREG STAFFORD is also the author of *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses* and of various articles and debates on biblical Christianity and the history and the beliefs of the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses. He is a Christian Witness of Jah, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who rejects traditions and beliefs that are not based on the best available evidence.



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start of his new relationship with “mankind” by means of New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:4). However it is, God will be “with” us in the “new heavens” and in the “new earth.” Jah and “the Lamb” will be the “temple” of New Jerusalem, “the nations will walk by means of its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.”—Revelation 21:22-24.

The “great crowd ... standing before the throne.” As part of his vision of the “new heavens” and the “new earth,” John describes a “New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:2). In the previous sub-section I presented reasons from the Bible showing that “New Jerusalem” is a “heavenly city” through which God will “dwell” with “mankind.” By means of this “city,” the glory of God and light from “the Lamb” will guide “the nations” as they bring ‘their glory and the honor into New Jerusalem’ (Revelation 21:22-26; compare Isaiah 60:3). But the precise identity of these “nations” is an area of dispute between Jehovah’s Witnesses and others.

Earlier in the book of Revelation, specifically in Chapter 7 verses 9-17, John refers to a “great crowd” which comes “out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues.” This “great crowd” has several striking similarities with the “mankind” of Revelation 21:3. For example, in Revelation 7:15-17 we read that God will “spread his tent over” the “great crowd,” which leads to the elimination of hunger and “any scorching heat,” and to God ‘wiping out every tear from the eyes’ of the “great crowd.” This is similar to Revelation 21:3-4, where the “tent of God” is again presented and where God is again described as removing “every tear from their eyes,” with “death,” “mourning,” ‘outcrying,’ and “pain” said to be “no more.” In both Revelation Chapters 7 and 21 God blesses “mankind,” though in Revelation 21 it is clear that Jah God does this through “New Jerusalem,” which is “coming down out of heaven” from him.

Still, not everyone believes the “great crowd” of Revelation Chapter 7 is a reference to the “mankind” of Revelation Chapter 21. Many believe the “great crowd” which John saw “before the throne of God” (Greek: ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ, *enopion tou thronou tou theou*) is actually in heaven, in God’s “temple” (Greek: *na'os*) serving “him day and night” (Revelation 7:15). Indeed, it could be argued that being “before the throne of God”

involves being in the heavenly presence of God, even as it appears to mean in Revelation 4:6, 10, 8:3, and 14:3. But the Greek word translated “before” in all of these texts (*enopion*) does not always mean the one(s) “before” the throne or “before” God are literally in his heavenly presence. That is why Paul wrote to Timothy, “In the presence [*enopion*] of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor, doing nothing from partiality.”—1 Timothy 5:21, RSV.

Clearly, Paul was not *in heaven* in the presence “of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels” when he wrote the last words in the above paragraph. But he was ‘in their sight’ because he was *observable* by them, even though Paul himself was on the earth. This is consistent with Psalm 11:4, which tells us Jah “is in his holy temple ... in the heavens is his throne ... [and] his own beaming eyes examine the sons of men” (see 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 14:2; 113:5-6; Matthew 23:22). Further, 1 Timothy 6:13, Galatians 1:20, and 2 Corinthians 4:2 all use *enopion* to describe what is done *on the earth*, but “in the sight of” God.²⁸

Bowman is one scholar and Witness critic who believes the “great crowd” of Revelation 7:9 is in the heavens before God’s throne. Bowman believes this “great crowd” is the same “great crowd” of Revelation 19:1, which is explicitly described as “in heaven.” Bowman gives four reasons for identifying these two ‘great crowds’ as the same: 1) “these are the only places in Revelation where the expression ‘the great crowd’ is used”; 2) “both crowds shout in a loud voice”; 3) “both begin their cry in the same way”; and 4) “the elders and the four living creatures” react the same way, using the same opening word, “Amen.”²⁹ I will now review and respond to each of Bowman’s four reasons:

- 1) ***“These are the only places in Revelation where the expression ‘the great crowd’ is used.”*** Bowman begins the first point under his “b” section (from which the above four points are taken) with reference to both Revelation 7:9-17 and 19:1. But after he presents these two texts Bowman

²⁸ This same use of *enopion* for “in the sight of” can also be found in the LXX of Ex 22:8, 9; 23:15 and 17.

²⁹ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, pages 56-57.

writes, “Both describe a ‘great crowd’ (7:9; 19:1, 6).” Yet, if you look at Bowman’s parenthetical references there are three passages referenced, not two. Bowman throws in Revelation 19:6 even though he is supposedly considering only “two passages.” So why include the “great crowd” of 19:6 in a discussion of the ‘great crowds’ of Revelation 7:9-17 and 19:1? The reason appears to be because if Bowman cannot identify the “great crowd” of Revelation 19:1 with the “great crowd” of 19:6, then there is at least one other “great crowd” which must be identified. This is true even if the ‘great crowds’ of Revelation 7:9 and 19:1 are the same. This alone could be used to show that (in the book of Revelation) the “great crowd” can have more than one meaning. Thus, we must carefully consider each reference.

I do not believe there are any parallels between the “great crowd” of Revelation 19:6 and the ‘great crowds’ of Revelation 7:9 and 19:1. They are not the same in terms of the “loud voice” that is described (see Bowman’s point #2 [discussed below]); they do not “begin their cry in the same way” (see Bowman’s point #3 [discussed below]); and the elders and the four living creatures do not react the same way in each text (see Bowman’s point #4 [discussed below]). John appears to be presenting a series of different groups all of whom “Praise Jah!” for his judgment on “Babylon the Great.” This presentation of groups, each of whom praise Jah in turn, suggests the “great crowd” of Revelation 19:1 is *not* the same “great crowd” of 19:6.

- 2) **“Both crowds shout in a loud voice.”** In Revelation 7:10 a form of the Greek verb κράζω (*krazo*, “cry aloud”) characterizes the manner in which the “great crowd” speaks. But this verb is not used in Revelation 19:1. Additionally, the adjective “loud” (a form of *megas*, meaning “great”) modifies “voice” (φωνή, *phone*) twenty times in Revelation. After examining these uses it is clear to me that no one individual or group is presented as unique in terms of having his/their voice so described. If we set aside the two examples in Revelation 7:10 and 19:1, *megas* modifies Jesus’ *phone* (“voice”) in 1:10, an angel’s voice in 5:2, 7:2, 10:3, 14:7, 9, 15, 18, and in 19:17, as well as multiple angels, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders in 5:12, and even

the 'slaughtered souls' under the altar in 6:10, an "eagle" in 8:13, an unidentified heavenly being in 11:12, 12:10, 16:1, 17, 21:3, and finally a group of unidentified heavenly beings in 11:15. If Revelation 7:10 and 19:1 were the only two places where this expression was used, then Bowman might have had a reason to consider further, namely, a uniquely identifying characteristic or feature of the "great crowd." But as it turns out, the feature Bowman cites ('shouting in a loud voice') is not so exclusive after all.

- 3) ***"Both begin their cry in the same way."*** The fact is, while there are similarities between what is said by the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 and 19:1, there are also significant differences which are not cited or discussed by Bowman. For example, only in Revelation 7:10 do we find reference to a "cry." Yet, Bowman uses "cry" in reference to both texts, which implies that the same verb is used in each text though it is not. Only one text (7:10) uses a form of *krazo*, which means to "cry aloud." Other striking dissimilarities between the 'cries' of each "great crowd" can be seen in the following comparison of each text in Greek, followed by the English translation of the NASB:

Revelation 7:10:

Ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ
 "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Revelation 19:1:

Ἄλληλουϊά ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν
 "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God."

The only similarity between what is said by each "great crowd" when they speak of "salvation." The differences include the fact that in 7:10 the words are spoken to "God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (underlining added), but in 19:10 it is God *alone* whom the "great crowd" addresses. Also, they do not "begin their cry in same way," as Bowman claims. The "great crowd" in 19:1 begins with the Greek word *allelouia*, which is a combination of the two Greek words *allelou* ("praise") and *Ia* ("Jah"), which are themselves transliterations (reproductions of sounds from one language into another language) of the Hebrew words

הללו (halelu ["praise"]) and יה (Yah ["Jah"]).³⁰ Thus, the "great crowd" of Revelation 19:1 'begins' its cry with, "Praise Jah!" The "great crowd" in 7:10 does not.

Still another difference in the way that the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 and 19:1 begin speaking is that while "glory" and "power" are a part of the expression in 19:1, they are not included in what is said by the "great crowd" in 7:10. Finally, there is a difference in the grammatical case used for "God" which may indicate a different sense for how each "great crowd" speaks about "salvation" in reference to God. The NASB attempts to communicate this by using "belong to" in Revelation 19:1 (where the genitive case for "God" is used), but not in 7:10 (where the dative case for "God" is used). The genitive case for "God" is also used in Revelation 12:10, which is more similar to 19:1 than it is to 7:10 in terms of the things which are attributed to God.

- 4) ***"The elders and the four living creatures" react the same way, using the same opening word, "Amen."*** Regarding the reaction of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, in Revelation 7:9 the "great crowd" which is taken "out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues" is "standing before [Greek: *enopion*] the throne and before the Lamb." After this "great crowd" cries out to God in verse 10, verse 11 refers to the "angels standing *around* [Greek: *kyklo*, used as an adverb meaning they stood 'in a circle' or 'round about'] the throne and the elders and the four living creatures." Obviously, from what is written here the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 does not include the angels, the twenty-four elders, or the four living creatures! But after the great crowd of 19:1-3 finishes speaking it is only the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fall down and worship God; the angels are not mentioned! What this means is the angels could very well be "great crowd" of Revelation 19:1-3. Indeed, in Revelation 5:12 it is the angels (along with the "four living creatures" and the "twenty-four elders") who are referred to as "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (compare Hebrews 12:22). Surely this constitutes a "great crowd" in heaven which could be presented in

³⁰ See Chapter 1, pages 95-100, for more on the meaning and use of "Hallelujah."

Revelation 19:1-3 as praising Jah for his judgment against Babylon the Great.—Compare Revelation 16:5-6.³¹

Also, the action of falling down and worshiping God after praise and thanksgiving are offered to him is not something done only *after* the 'great crowds' of Revelation 7:10 and 19:1-3 finish speaking. Rather, it is something the twenty-four elders do "*whenever* the living creatures offer glory and honor and thanksgiving to the one seated on the throne" (Revelation 4:9-11; compare 11:15-17). As for the use of "Amen" in the opening words of 7:12 and 19:4, Bowman is only telling half of the story. What he does not mention is that only in Revelation 7:12 does "Amen" begin *and end* the worshipful address to God. If the use of "Amen" at the beginning of each statement to God is as significant as Bowman suggests, then why does he not see a similar significance *in the difference* in meaning for the use of the same word *at the end* of each expression? "Amen" is also used as the opening (and as the only!) word of the four living creatures in 5:14, in a context in which praise is given to both God and the Lamb, as in Revelation 7:10.

After reviewing Bowman's reasons for identifying the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 with the "great crowd" of Revelation 19:1-3, 6, I reject his conclusions. Further, Bowman has failed to adequately treat the parallels and the differences between these and other Bible accounts. As I explained above, Revelation 7:9-17 refers to God's "tent" as being "spread over" those who come out of the "great tribulation," people who come from all earthly 'nations, tribes, peoples and tongues.' Later in Revelation 21:3 there is another reference to "the tent of God" as being "with mankind." The presence of this "tent" is not the only similarity between these two accounts. Indeed, the effects of God's "tent" are also the same, for in both Revelation 7 and 21 we read that

³¹ In the Watchtower publication *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!* the "great crowd" of Rev 19:1 is called a "heavenly chorus" (page 272). In its *Reasoning from the Scriptures* book (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), page 168, the Watchtower Society considers both the "great crowd" of 19:1 and 19:6 to be "angels."

“God will wipe our every tear from their eyes.”—Revelation 7:17; 21:4.³²

Jah’s Promises

Hebrews 11 and the “promises” to “men of old.” Some believe that in Hebrews Chapter 11 there are good reasons for believing faithful men and women of old (such as Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Noah, Enoch and others) were looking forward to a future life in the “new heavens,” *not* to a future life in the “new earth.” If this is true, then teaching as do Jehovah’s Witnesses that these biblical figures “will soon be resurrected to life in the earthly domain of the ‘city’ God made ready for them”³³ should be reconsidered, or left open to more than one interpretation based on good reasons.

Jehovah’s Witnesses read what is written in the Bible about the “new heavens” and about the “new earth,” as well as what is written about those who will live in each. We believe the Bible teaches that some resurrected people will be with “the Lamb standing upon the Mount Zion” (which is “heavenly Jerusalem” and “New Jerusalem,” as explained in the previous sub-section), and there will be those over whom God will “spread his tent,” namely, “mankind” (Revelation 14:1; 21:1-4). The Bible is also clear that “in these” (a plural reference showing that the “new heavens” is *not* identical to the “new earth”) “righteousness is to dwell.”—2 Peter 3:13.

While these beliefs are based on good reasons, the Christian Witnesses of Jah do not put forth positions about things such as whether Solomon will be resurrected,³⁴ or whether Jah will bring to life any of his faithful servants of old to live in heaven or on earth with him. The answers to these questions belong to Jah, and to Jesus, to whom the Father has given “authority to do judging”

³² Even Bowman recognizes this connection (Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses*, page 52, section C.1.a.[3]), though he does not identify the “mankind” of Rev 21:3 as the “great crowd” of Rev 7:9.

³³ “Respond to God’s Promises by Exercising Faith,” *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1993, page 17, par. 20.

³⁴ See, for example, the “Questions from Readers” published in *The Watchtower*, July 15, 2005, page 31.