

The Lamb Will Shepherd The Nations

Revelation 7:1-17

Introduction: 1) In 1 Peter 2:24-25 the Bible reads, “by His wounding you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” (HCSB). *The Message* says it like this, “His wounds became your healing. You were lost sheep with no idea who you were or where you were going. Now you’re named and kept for good by the shepherd of your souls.”

2) We all desperately need a “Shepherd for our souls” don’t we? The nations need a Shepherd for their souls who will, as Revelation 7:17 promises, “guide them to springs of living water, and...wipe away every tear from their eyes.” How can He do this? He can do it because He washed us clean and made our robes “white in the blood of the Lamb.” (7:14). The Lamb, who is a Lion (Rev. 5), is also the one who is our Shepherd.

3) Revelation 7 has been the subject of much discussion and disagreement, especially verses 1-8. Is the “144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel

1) 144,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses who will reign in heaven; 2) Selected Sabbitarians who honor and worship on the 7th day of the week; 3) The Church as the “New Israel” and thus the redeemed of all the ages symbolically represented; or 4) Jewish believers who are saved and sealed for service during what John calls, “the great

tribulation” (7:14), the great day of wrath” (6:17)? While I do have my own view and will briefly note it, to wrestle excessively over this is to miss the fact that Jew and Gentile alike will be gathered around the throne and the Lamb in heaven (7:9), and that the focus of this text is the worship of this Lamb who will Shepherd all the nations. In other words this is one of the greatest texts in all of the Bible to encourage a passionate, radical and sacrificial missionary agenda because the Lord Jesus has promised us: all the *enthes*, every nation, will be there!

4) Revelation 7 is an interlude, parenthesis, or complementary perspective between the 6th and 7th seal. It consists of 2 visions (7:1-8 and 7:9-17) and it provides an answer to the ominous question that concludes chapter 6: “Who can stand in the Day of the Lamb’s wrath?” Answer: those who have “the seal of the living God! (7:2). Robert Mounce says it well, “The vision contrast the security and blessedness that await the faithful with the panick of a pagan world fleeing from judgment” (NICNT, rev.ed., 154).

I. We are sealed and protected by the Lamb 7:1-8

In chapter 6 the Lamb begins to unfold the eschatological scroll introduced in chapter 5. He breaks 6 of the 7 seals and we are introduced to the “4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” Massive destruction sweeps across the earth (6:1-8), martyred saints in heaven cry for justice (6:9-12) and those on the earth seek to hide from him who is seated on the throne (God the Father) and the Lamb (God the Son;

6:16). It appears no one will survive, much less stand against the righteous wrath of God. But then we see two wonderful truths emerge: 1) In wrath the Lord shows mercy (cf. Hab. 3:2) and 2) The Lord keeps His promise.

1) In wrath the Lords shows mercy 7:1-3

- “After this,” after the 6 seals of chapter 6, John saw “4 angels standing at the four corners of the earth,” a figure of speech noting the four directional points of the compass. They are said to be holding back four winds of judgment that have the “power to harm earth and sea” (v. 2), “the earth or the sea or the trees” (v. 3). They are agents of righteous judgment and destruction and they are ready to act.
- However, their hand of judgment is stayed, or at least delayed. In this apocalyptic vision John sees “another angel (*allon aggelon*)”, ascending from the rising of the sun,” from the east (v.2). A number of Bible teachers have pointed out that many good things in Scripture come from/are in the East (Gen. 2:8; Ezk. 43:2; Matt. 2:1; Luke 1:78; Rev. 22:16). This angel is not a messenger of destruction and death, but one of grace and mercy. He has with him “the seal of the living God” (v.2), a seal with which he will mark “the servants of God on their forehead.” Revelation 14:1 informs us this seal is the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father (cf. 22:4). This sealing, with Old Testament roots in

Ezekiel 9:4, is a sign, a promise of divine possession and protection.

Gordon Fee notes, “the “seal” in this case is the stamp of divine ownership and authenticity; thus it functions as a divine commitment that God’s own people will not experience the divine wrath when it is poured out...At the same time...this marking of the foreheads of God’s servants stands in deliberate contrast to the later marking on the foreheads of followers of the “beast out of the earth” in chapter 13:16-17” (NCCS, 107). In wrath our God shows mercy.

2) Seeing unfaithfulness the Lord still keeps his promise 7:4-8

- “The seal of the living God” (14 times in the New Testament; see also Josh 3:10; Psalm 42:2 Hosea 1:10), the one true God who stands in contrast to all false gods and idols of this world, is now applied to 144,000 “from every tribe of the sons of Israel” (v.4). The number is carefully catalogued in verses 5-8. My own dogmatism over the correct interpretation of these verses has softened over the years. I have good friends and I know respected evangelicals who understand the verses different than do I. And, they make good arguments. They understand the 144,000 to be the Church, the whole people of God.
- Still, I remain convinced the 144,000 sons of Israel represents Jewish believers who are included in the one people of God and the great

multitude of Revelation 7:9. I find this view to be consistent with and supported by:

- 1) The Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:1-3.
 - 2) The Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12-16.
 - 3) The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (and verses 35-37).
 - 4) The promise of Jesus to the apostles in Matthew 19:28.
 - 5) The answer of Jesus to the kingdom question in Acts 1:6-8.
 - 6) The prophecy and promise of Paul in Romans 11:25-29.
 - 7) The depiction of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:12-14.
- Some would object and ask, “What about the peculiarities in the list, specifically 1) Judah appearing first, 2) Levi being included, and 3) the absence of Dan and Ephraim? I would simply note:
 - 1) There are 19 different arrangements of the names of the Tribes in the Old Testament, and this list is different from all of them.
 - 2) Judah is listed first because Messiah, our Lord Jesus, comes from Judah (see Gen. 49:9-10; Rev. 5:5)
 - 3) Levi, though not allotted a portion of land, is rightly involved in this sealing for security and service.
 - 4) Ephraim is replaced by Joseph possibly because of its history of idolatry and its allying with the enemies of Judah (Isaiah 7:2, 5; Hosea

5:3). Yet, the inclusion of Joseph allows for the inclusion of Ephraim, but without the mention of his name.

- 5) Dan is omitted, replaced by Levi, because of its practice of gross idolatry. Further, a pre-Christian Jewish tradition said Antichrist would come from Dan!

Genesis 49:17 says “Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse’s heels, so that his rider falls backward.”

The Testament of Dan (5:6) said Satan is the prince of Dan. Ireanaeus (2nd Century) noted the tradition that Antichrist would come from Dan, and Hippolytus wrote, “As the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the Antichrist be born from the tribe of Dan” (Mounce, 159-60).

However, it seems that Ezekiel 48 and Mathew 19:28 make it clear that all the tribes will be honored and share in the millennial reign of Christ. During this time Hebrew Christians will receive the Lamb’s name and the Father’s name as their seal (14:1) and for their service, again standing in stark contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and follow Antichrist (13:17; 14:11; 16:2; 19:20).

*However, we miss the main point if we fail to see that our God in this day, that day, in every day, has His faithful servants who are His possession and have His protection: unfaithful as Israel has been, unfaithful as we have been, our God, in stark contrast, is completely and utterly faithful. Having sealed us with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), He maintains His covenant promises to His people. We find ourselves saved, safe and secure. In the Lamb, we have His stamp of approval!

II. We are saved and made pure through the Lamb 7:9-12

- John now sees a 2nd vision. It complements the 1st, but it is significantly different.
 - The 1st is on earth, the 2nd is in heaven.
 - The 1st concerns “144,000 sons of Israel”, the 2nd concerns “a great multitude no one could number: (7:9).

I love what Craig Keener says of these verse, “here the promised multitude is gathered from all nations; the hope of the gospel has touched all people” (NIVAV, 243). Keener is right on target. Note two wonderful aspects of this “gospel of the Lamb” that indeed has touched all peoples.

1) The scope of His salvation is global 7:9-10

- After seeing the 144,000, John sees a great multitude that is innumerable “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (cf. 5:9;

11:9 13:7; 14:6). Echoing God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:5 and 32:12, their number is like the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea. In this massive throng of the redeemed in heaven, there is not the slightest hint of bigotry, ethnocentrism, prejudice or racism. Of the 11, 243 people groups in the world, each is present and represented. Of the 3,056 people groups currently unengaged, each is represented (IMB Global Research, 3-17-14). Of the 3.7 billion still not having an adequate opportunity to hear the gospel, the Lamb is reaching out and calling them unto Himself by the Spirit and through His people. The gospel is going to be heard and believed among all the peoples of the earth. The nations will rejoice! The nations will worship!

- Take note of 4 things said about these people in heaven:
 - 1) Their location – before the throne (of God) and before the Lamb.
Now the question of 6:17 is answered as to who can stand. It is the redeemed!
 - 2) Their clothing – clothed permanently in white robes of victory and purity, they stand before God in the imputed, perfect righteousness of the Lamb (v.14).
 - 3) Note their instruments of worship – palm branches of joy, celebration and praise.

4) Their confession – they are crying (continually) with a loud voice (c.f. v. 2) saying: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” Deliverance from sin and victory over Satan is ours because of the Father on the throne and the Son (Lamb) at His side.

The scope of His salvation is global!

2) The scope of His salvation is glorious (7:11-12)

- Once more the angels join in the worship of heaven (cf. 5:11-14). “All” the angels were standing around the throne...” This looks back to the “thousands of thousands” in 5:11. Like the elders in 5:14 the angels fell on their faces before the Lord. This scene is holy, this time sacred. Like the saints in verse 10 they speak not of what God has done but to who God is. Sandwiching a 7-fold blessing is the word “Amen.” They affirm what the saints have said and then add their own words of adoration, praise and worship.

1) Blessing (*eulogia*) – a good word, a praise.

2) Glory (*doxa*) – honor derived from one’s character and a good reputation; it is the radiance or outshining of the divine person.

3) Wisdom (*sophia*) – divine knowledge and perspective on all things, especially in the outworking of God’s plan of salvation.

4) Thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) – we get our word “Eucharist” from it.

5) Honor (time) – esteem, public and deserved recognition (c.f. 4:11; 5:12, 13).

6) Power (*dunamis*) – God’s omnipotence, his ability to act as He wills.

7) Might (*ischus*) – strength as a quality one has. Might is often related to God’s might acts in salvation history.

All of this has one focus, one direction, one and only one deserving object: “to our God forever and ever” (v. 12). This word of worship is not temporary, it is eternal. It is not for a moment, but forever. This is the praise of all nations and angels that is ringing through the corridors of heaven.

- I think it is significant that once again, as we saw in chapter 5, the theme of the Lamb is prominent (7:9, 10, 14, 17). The fact is the theme of the Lamb is prominent throughout Scripture beginning in Genesis and culminating in Revelation. In Genesis 22 God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only son named Issac. When the boy asks his father, “where is the lamb for burnt offering? Abraham answered, “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (22:7-8). On this occasion God would provide a ram (22:13). 2000 years later He would provide the Lamb.

In Exodus 12:5, we are told that the Passover must be sacrificed, and that the Lamb must be without blemish. In Isaiah 53 we meet the Messianic Suffering Servant of the Lord. We are told in verse 7 that He was led as a lamb to slaughter. We then come to the New Testament and the ministry of John the Baptist, who seeing the Lord Jesus declares, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Now, in Revelation, we see the eschatological warrior Lamb on the throne with His Father. He had been slain but now He stands as the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent resurrected Lamb, a Lamb who is a Lion, and also a Lamb, as we now see, who is a Shepherd.

III. We are satisfied and provided for in the Lamb 7:13-17

- This glorious vision of all nations gathered around the throne and the Lamb now reaches a crescendo, but it also takes a surprising turn. As it does, blessings flow in our direction that are too great to imagine. They are certainly underserving. And, they are blessings that also must be shared with the nations that the Lamb will shepherd. That is His intention. That gives us our mission.

1) He made us clean 7:13-14

- One of the elders (cf. 4:4, 10-11; 5:5-6, 8, 11), one of the redeemed, speaks to John asking him the identity of the great multitude clothed in white

robes (v. 13). John bats the ball back, no doubt out of ignorance or at least uncertainty, and says to the elder, “Sir, you know” their identity. The elder responds (v. 14) directly and to the point, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

- I am in basic agreement with Mounce who says,

“The use of the definite article in the phrase “the great tribulation” indicated that the angel is referring primarily to that final series of woes which will immediately precede the end. It is the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world (3:10). It is not “the awesome totality of tribulation which from century to century has been the experience of the people of God” nor does it correspond to “the entire history of the church –past, present, and future.” It is that specific period of distress and cruel persecution which will take place prior to the return of Christ. Prophesied by Daniel (12:1) and reflected on the screen of history at the fall of Jerusalem (Mark 13:19 and parallels), it finds its fulfillment in that final persecution which supplies the full complement of Christian martyrs (6:11).... Their robes are white by virtue of the redemptive death of the Lamb. Their rewards are those of all the faithful. Persecution has always been the lot of those who

follow the Lamb (John 16:33; 2Tim. 3:12). The intensity of the final conflict of righteousness and evil will rise to such a pitch as to become *the great tribulation.*” (NICNT, 164).

- While I do think this is the best understanding of the text, what we all can agree and focus on is the wonderful truth, “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”. The metaphor is striking and even paradoxical, perhaps drawn from Isaiah 1:18. The Lamb took our filthy, soiled, ugly garments of sin and plunged them into His red, pure blood (His death) and miraculously and supernatural they come out white, pure, clean.
- Corrie ten Boom, Christian Holocaust survivor and protector of Jewish persons, said of the cleansing and redeeming blood of the Lord Jesus,

“The blood of Jesus Christ has great power! There is perhaps not a phrase in the Bible that is so full of secret truth as is “the blood of Jesus.” It is the secret of His incarnation, when Jesus took on flesh and blood; the secret of His obedience unto death, when He gave His life at the cross of Calvary; the secret of His love that went beyond all understanding when He bought us with His blood; the secret of the enemy and the secret of our eternal salvation.”¹

¹ Quoted in *Israel My Glory*, March/April 2014, p. 15.

- “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.”

2) He lets us serve 7:15

- Verses 15-17 “form a poetic stanza... They depict the eternal blessings of God shared inclusively by the redeemed” (Smalley, *The Revelation of John*, 198). Once again they are located “before the throne of God”, granted access by virtue of the fact “they have washed their robes and made them with in the blood of the Lamb” (v.14).
- Here, they serve (present tense) in priestly and worshipful service day and night, that is continually, in his temple. Later, in Revelation 21:22, John says, “And I saw no temple in the city (i.e. the New Jerusalem), for its temple is the Lord God, the almighty, and the Lamb.”
- It is interesting to note that in Luke 2:37, it is said of the prophetess Anna, “She did not depart from the temple, worshiping (same Greek word) with fasting and prayer night and day”. Any thought of heaven being a boring and dull place is banished forever by the beautiful simplicity of this verse. For all of eternity it will be our delightful and joyful privilege to serve in the worship of Him who saved us by washing us clean by His blood.

3) He gives us His presence 7:15

- The one “who sits on the throne will shelter them (us) with his presence.” Literally, “he will spread His tent (tabernacle) over them.” This calls to mind the tabernacle in the wilderness (Leviticus 26 ff.), the pillar of cloud and of fire (Exodus 13:21-22), the Shekinah Glory of God’s radiant presence in the midst of His people (Exodus 40:34-38) and the incarnation of the Son (John 1:14). God is with them, right there in their very midst. Never again will they feel forsaken, never again will they be tortured and tormented. They will enjoy the supreme presence and protection of the Lord God Himself forever and ever.

4) He provides for us our needs 7:16

- Hunger and thirst were constant obstacles and threats in the ancient world. They remain so for much of our world today, but not so in heaven. Starvation, thirst, and the burning heat of the hot sun will find no place in heaven. This is almost a direct contrast with what the 4 Horsemen bring in 6:1-8. They curse, but God blesses. They bring suffering and sorrow, but God gives us satisfaction.
- The language here draws on Isaiah 49:10 and Isaiah’s description of returning exiles from Babylon. It also recalls the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:6; John 4:14; 6:35 and 7:37. Every need is met by the Lamb who is, as we now see, ...

5) He promises us to be our Shepherd 7:17

- In chapter 5 we saw a Lamb who is also a Lion. Now we see a Lamb who is also a Shepherd. And what a Shepherd He is! He is a Shepherd-King in the midst of the throne, like the Shepherd-King in the Song of Songs. He is like the Lord our Shepherd in Psalm 23, one who “will guide them to springs of living water (Lit. “life foundations of water”).” He is the Good Shepherd of John 10, who “will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”
- The Shepherd image is one of the richest and most beloved in all of Scripture. Why? Because everyone needs a Shepherd of their soul. We find this image taking shape when God called a little shepherd boy named David to be Israel’s king. It is said of this shepherd that he was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Later this shepherd-king would pen the most beloved song in the entire Psalter where we are taught, “The Lord is my Shepherd”, and because He is, I have all I need (Ps. 23:1). Then, when the nation is in exile, having been abused by those who should have been “shepherds of Israel” (Ezk. 34:2), God makes a promise to His people, “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezk. 34:23). And in Micah 5:2-4, His promised

shepherd is said to come out of Bethlehem,” the house of bread.” Of Him it is promised, “he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the mystery of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.” Micah 5:5 adds, “and he shall be their peace.” We then arrive to the New Testament where all of these Old Testament promises and themes find their fulfillment in the “Good Shepherd” of John 10, the “Great Shepherd” of Hebrews 13:20, the “chief Shepherd” of 1 Peter 5:4, the “Shepherd of souls” of 1 Peter 2:25, and the “Shepherd King” of Revelation 7:17! What a Shepherd He is.

Conclusion: Several years ago I came across an article entitled “The Room.” Only recently did I discover it was written by my friend Joshua Harris (It first appeared in *New Attitude*, 1995). It is a real dream that Joshua had, and it beautifully illustrates why we, why the nations, need to hear about and know this Lamb who is a Shepherd, a Shepherd of our souls.

“In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in “the room.” There were no distinguishing features save for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction,

had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read “Girls I Have Liked.” I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one.

And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room and its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the thoughts and actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn't match.

A sense of wonder and curiosity, couple with horror, stirred within me and I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories, others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching. A file named “Friends” was next to one marked “Friends I Have Betrayed.”

The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. “Books I have Read,” “Lies I Have Told,” “Comfort I Have Given,” “Jokes I Have Laughed At.” Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: “Things I've Yelled at My Brother.” Others I couldn't laugh at: “Things I Have Done in My Anger,” “Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents.” I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped.

I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my [brief life] to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed the truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature.

When I pulled out the file marked “Songs I Have Listened To,” I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly, and yet after two or three yards, I hadn’t found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much by the quality of music, but more by the vast amount of time I knew that file represented.

When I came to a file marked “Lustful Thoughts,” I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded.

An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: “No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!” In an insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn’t matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it.

Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh. And then I saw it. The title bore “People I Have Shared the Gospel With.” The handle was brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards in contained on one hand.

And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that the hurt started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key.

But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please not Him. Oh, anyone but Jesus.

I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn't bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than any own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did he have to read every one? Finally, He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn't anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He

walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn't say a word. He just cried with me.

Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card.

"No!" I shouted rushing to Him. All I could find to say was "No, no," as I tried to pull the card from Him. His name shouldn't be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood.

He gently took the card back. He smiled a gentle smile and began to sign the cards. I don't think I'll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, "It is finished."

I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door.

There were still cards to be written." (joshharris.com)

Yes, there are cards to still be written. But praise His Name, each and every one has been covered with His Name and by His blood. Hallelujah! What a Shepherd. Hallelujah! What a Savior!