

THE LAMB WILL BE THEIR SHEPHERD

Revelation 7

Introduction:

One of the interesting aspects of the book of Revelation, which I mentioned briefly in a previous message, is that not everything is laid out chronologically. There are time gaps in some places, and sometimes John's visions take him back to information that fits into earlier spots in the timeline of events.

Chapter 7 is one of those portions of the book that kind of stands out from the timeline that is presented. It is not out of order chronologically, but it is almost like a parenthesis—you could easily skip the 7th chapter and not notice that you were missing anything. Chapter 6 ends with the opening of the sixth seal and chapter 8 begins with the opening of the seventh seal. But in this chapter there are some important events and elements that we need to see.

However, once again before we get into the text for today, I want to take you to another matter for a few minutes. A couple of weeks ago I distributed a chart of the book of Revelation that was compiled by David Levy – looks like this (PP slide). What I want to draw your attention to is the first half of the tribulation period.

You will note on your chart that the first six seals, which we looked at last time fill the entire 42 months of the first half of the Tribulation. But there are also many other events going on during this time, which are talked about in other parts of the book of Revelation. See the bottom area of the chart. Note the different chapters from the book that show up in this time period.

The other thing to note here is that there are three main groupings of events in the judgment of God on the earth. See the center area of the chart. Seven seals → seven trumpets → seven bowls or vials. In each case the one group ushers in the next. When the seventh seal is opened it ushers in or sets in motion the next stage of God's judgment – the trumpets. Then the same thing happens with the 7th trumpet.

Well let's get into the text before us today. There are two main parts to chapter 7, but they both deal with believers in the Tribulation. There was a time when I had the idea that once the Rapture took place, there was no more hope. Those left behind had missed their chance and were destined for eternal hell. However, I have come to see that is not the case. Let's read Revelation 7.

Read the passage.

There are two distinct groups of people portrayed in this chapter. The first is...

The 144,000 Sealed from the tribes of Israel

"After this..." Here is an indication that this was the beginning of a new vision in which John was being given more information about what was to happen in the future.

In this vision, John sees five angels. There are four angels at the four corners of the earth – like the four points of the compass. They are holding back the four winds – the judgment of God.

A fifth angel comes out of the east, carrying with him the seal of God. His purpose is to put the seal of God on the foreheads of a large group of people. These people are identified as the "...servants of our God..." Literally the word is bondservant or slave. The purpose of this sealing is not stated. However it is most likely to protect them from death from either the persecution of the Antichrist or the natural disasters which are to take place. It is clear that they do indeed survive the Great Tribulation period as they appear with Christ on Mount Zion after his return to earth – chapter 14. The instruction of this angel is to hold back the judgment of God until this sealing is completed.

John identifies in v. 4 the number of those who are sealed. It is 144,000. He also identifies who these sealed ones are. They are Jews, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, the descendants of Jacob. There is no reason to interpret this in any way other than literally, according to what it says. David Levy says, "This has no reference to a spiritual Israel, represented by the church, or a super-spiritual group of individuals who will be guaranteed a place in heaven because of their

faithful service to God on earth. The term *Israel* must refer to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The fact that the 12 tribes are singled out during the Tribulation indicates that this is speaking of a literal, physical Israel.”

It is interesting, however, that the twelve tribes listed differs somewhat from the twelve tribes who were allotted territory in the conquest of Canaan. Dan is missing from this list, replaced by Levi, who had no land inheritance in Canaan. Ephraim is replaced by Joseph. It is not clear why these changes were made, but God always has his reasons. It may have something to do with the fact that Dan and Ephraim were instrumental in leading the nation into idolatry.

Anyway, once this vision was complete, John is quickly taken into another vision, introduced in v. 9 – “After this...”

A Multitude of Martyrs

The scene is again one of worship. A multitude, beyond number, people from every tribe, language, and nation on earth are seen standing before the throne, and before the Lamb. They are clothed in white robes, indicative of the righteousness of Christ, and they are worshipping the one who is seated on the throne and the Lamb. At the sound of their worship they are joined by the others we have seen around the throne, the angels, the elders and the four living creatures, all falling down and worshipping. They cry out in another sevenfold doxology similar to what we saw in chapter 5:12.

Who are these people, this vast multitude of believers, and where did they come from? They are certainly not the 144,000 mentioned in the previous verses. Those were Jews, sealed from the tribes of Israel. These are people from all over the world of every race and ethnic group. This is a vast multitude of people who became believers during the Tribulation. Many of these had died violent deaths because of their determination to take a stand for Christ.

So how is it that all these people have become believers during the Tribulation? Again I would like to refer to some teaching of David Levy in his book, “Revelation, Hearing the Last Word.”

Certainly their salvation did not come through the witness of the church. There is no indication that the church is on earth during this Tribulation period. In Matthew 24, Jesus predicts many signs that will precede the second coming of Christ. When seen in the proper context, these signs would take place not during the church age, but during the Tribulation, leading up to the return of Christ to establish His kingdom. One of those signs says, “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*” (Matthew 24:14 ESV)

So who is doing the preaching? There are three sources mentioned in the book of Revelation:

1. In 14:6 we read of an angel, “...with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.” (Revelation 14:6 ESV) He will fly above the earth proclaiming his message.
2. In 11:3 we read of two witnesses given special authority by God to prophesy for 1260 days (42 months). This is the first half of the seven-year Tribulation.
3. The third source of the message is the 144,000 sealed Jews we saw in the first part of this chapter. They are scattered throughout the earth by the persecution of the Antichrist, and carry the message with them. That is an interesting thought—that Gentiles for every tribe and nation will come to Christ through the witness of the Jews.

In v. 13, one of the elders asks the question, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” When John is unable to answer, the elder answers his own question. There are three specific things I want you to note about this multitude:

1. They have come out of great tribulation. They are ones who have come to believe in Jesus during the tribulation period and they have endured incredible tribulation and even violent death for their faith.
2. They are clothed in robes washed white by the blood of the Lamb. The whiteness of their apparel is indicative of righteousness, but their righteousness is not of their own doing. They have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. It is only the blood shed by the sinless Son of God that can produce righteousness.

3. They are seen before the throne in constant and continual service to the One who has redeemed them. The word “serve” means to render religious service or homage, to worship. They are obviously engaged in the worship of God who sits on the throne and of the Lamb. They serve continually, “day and night,” no longer restricted by the physical limitations of human beings on earth.

In the closing portion of this chapter we see the provision of God for these Tribulation martyrs. There are three key things:

1. They receive heavenly protection – v. 15. “...he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” (NIV - will spread his tent over them. KJV – dwell among them.) The word means to fix one’s tent or tabernacle, dwelling place.
2. The suffering and hardship they endured on earth will be replaced with heavenly provision – v. 16-17b.
3. The sorrows of earth will be replaced by everlasting joy – v. 17c. “...and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

This is a glorious chapter of hope. For those who come to faith in Christ after the rapture, the suffering will be intense, but it will be short-lived. They can be sure that they will be welcomed into glory where the sorrows and suffering will be replaced by incredible provision and eternal joy.

Conclusion

As we bring this message to a close we need to address the question, so what? What can we learn from this that helps us today? Well, I would like to draw your attention back to vv. 16-17 again – *read verses*.

The Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus himself, the one who gave himself as a sacrifice for mankind, will be their shepherd. He will protect them, and provide for them. They will hunger no more, he will guide them to springs of living water.

I am reminded of David, the psalmist, the shepherd-boy. We all know Psalm 23. I want you to think about those verses we just read in Revelation 7 as you hear the words of Psalm 23 – *recite it*. 3000 years ago, David knew and depended on God’s protection and provision. He

recognized the Lord God as his shepherd, the one who would be with him as his ever-present protector and provider, even in the face of death itself.

In Psalm 28, when David was going through dark times, facing the persecution of evil men, he cried out to the Lord, the only one who could sustain him in such a time. He came to this conclusion:

*“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! **Be their shepherd and carry them forever.**” (Psalms 28:7-9 ESV)*

Some day in the future, when those who choose follow Jesus Christ face the fiercest onslaught of evil from the Antichrist himself, they will find the Lord Jesus to be their shepherd, their ever-present protector and provider, bringing them safely through death to the joys of eternity.

What about us? Well, just as in the past and in the future, even now the Lord Jesus is our shepherd. In John 10, Jesus assured his disciples with these words:

“...he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice ... I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture ... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:3-4, 9, 14-15 ESV)

I don’t know what you are facing today—what kind of struggles, or disappointments. But I do know that the Lord to whom David looked for protection and provision centuries ago is the same Lord who will be the shepherd of those Tribulation saints who face the Antichrist’s sword. And he is the same Lord who will be our protector and provider today.

We are assured in Heb. 13:8 that Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. The Lamb will be their shepherd, and he is our shepherd today.