

Hurstbourne Baptist Church, January 17, 2021
Sermon Notes and Quotes: Revelation 7:1-17
“Good News from Revelation 7”

Introduction

- Many wonderful Christians have differences of opinion on the identity of the 144,000. I believe the 144,000 in Revelation 7 represent all of the people of God, both Jews and Gentiles who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. They are the ones that are sealed, and they are the ones who are protected and have no need to be afraid of judgment.
- If someone holds a little bit different view of the 144,000 in Revelation 7, then that is ok. We extend liberty and charity to one another on this point. Here is a wonderful quote to remember: “In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”
- With that in mind, let me share with you plainly my five reasons for thinking that the 144,000 people in Revelation 7 represent the collective people of God, including both Jews and Gentiles who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

5 Reasons

- **Reason #1**
 - According to Revelation 7:2 and 4, John “heard” the number of the sealed was 144,000. He **HEARD** about a **REMNANT** of Israel. And after **HEARING** about these 144,000 from the angel. We read in verse 9 that he **LOOKED**, and he saw, [that’s what behold means] “a great that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”
 - a. This same kind of “hearing” and “seeing” happened in Revelation 5. John was weeping because no one was found worthy to take the scroll from God (the One seated upon the throne”) and open it. John was weeping because, if that scroll never opened, then the eternal purposes of God would fail.
 - b. Then, behind John, someone called out, “Weep no more, behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (5:5).
 - c. John look to see a Lion (because that’s what the voice said). That’s what he **HEARD**. But when John turned and **LOOKED**, he **SAW** “a Lamb standing as though it had been slain” (5:6). John **HEARD** about a Lion, and he **SAW** a Lamb. Of course, these are both descriptions of Jesus. As Christians, we sometimes celebrate Jesus a Majestic and Conquering Lion and we sometimes celebrate Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb who takes away our sins. He’s both!
 - d. Something similar is happening here in Revelation 7. John **HEARS** of 144,000 who are sealed by God. And hears that it is 12,000 people from 12 tribes of Israel. So he turns to **LOOK** at the people of God. He expects to see a small group of ethnic Jews, numbered at 144,000. But when he turns to **SEE** who the people of God are, he discovers that it is “an innumerable multitude from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb, clothed in white” (7:9).
 - e. Does that group include ethnic Israel? Of course! But it also includes Gentiles who have become part of God’s family through faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Reason #2**
 - a. This second reason is a very minor point, but it sets up my third reason (which is a much stronger point). 10 of the twelve tribes of Israel have been lost in history, after the Assyrian deportation in 722BC. The Assyrians carried the Israelites off into captivity. After the

Assyrians relocated the children of Israel, much of Israel's tribal identity was lost. Here is one commentator: "A practical problem arises if the reference is to 12,000 from each tribe of Israel. Virtually no Jews today know from what tribe they descend, nor is it clear that most knew their genealogical ancestry in John's day" (Schreiner, Revelation, 622). Now, I say this is a weaker point, because of course, God knows His people. So I will just leave that point alone, and you can research it later: the ten lost tribes of Israel. It's not the strongest point, but that practical observation hopefully will help you consider this observation from Revelation 7, which is much stronger.

3. Reason #3

- a. The list of tribes in Revelation 7 does not match the list of the twelve tribes of ethnic Israel in the Old Testament.
- b. More specifically, John leaves out the tribe of Dan; he lists one of the half tribes of Joseph, who descended from Jacob (i.e., Manasseh). But then he leaves out the other half-tribe of Ephraim! And this is a bit odd, because he turns right around and includes both Joseph and Levi. So this list tribes does not strictly match the way that the Old Testament lists out the twelve tribes of Israel. Now, I don't think that John made some mistake in doing this. I believe he did this intentionally, as the Holy Spirit inspired him. Some commentators will point out that Dan and Ephraim were known for their idolatry. And this perhaps this explains why Joseph and Levi replaced Dan and Ephraim in John's list. But I believe that only reinforces the point that this list refers to the people of God in a symbolic and spiritual sense.

4. Reason #4

- a. "Not all Jews are Jews." According to the New Testament, the true children of Abraham are those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. No one insisted upon this truth more forcefully than Jesus himself. Jesus got himself into all kinds of arguments with the religious community over this very point. In John 8:39, the Pharisees (who were ethnic Jews) said to Jesus, "Abraham is our father." And Jesus said, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works that Abraham did, but you are seeking to kill me." They got mad at him and said, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father – even God." In other words, the Pharisees were firing back at Jesus something like, "We know you're illegitimate, but we're children of God." Jesus says to them, John 8:41, "If God were your Father, you would love me." And then verse 44, "You are of your father, the devil" (8:44). And by the time you get to the end of John 8, they are so Pharisees and Jews are so angry that they picked up stones to kill him, according to verse 59. That's in John's Gospel – same person who recorded the vision in Revelation 7.
- b. That's also why it is not all that surprising that John refers to ethnic Jews who reject Jesus as a Synagogue of Satan. Jesus told these believers, "I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you" (Revelation 3). SO that's reason number 3 why I think that the 144,000 refers to the redeemed people of God drawn from all over the earth, including Jews. But also including Gentiles who have been brought in.

5. Reason #5

- a. The 144,000 will come up again in Revelation 14. In Revelation 14, they are described – not as the redeemed of "Israel" – but as the "redeemed from the earth" (14:3) and as "the redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb" (14:4).

For these reasons, I believe that the 144,000 represent the people of God, both Jews and Gentiles, who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. I believe that Hurstbourne Baptist Church is represented in Revelation 7. I believe that we are sealed by God and will be present on that day, clothed in a white robe with a palm branch in hand, and that we will sing with that great multitude: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Three Practical Applications

1. Application #1: Revelation 7 should bolster our passion for Evangelism to all Nations.

- a. Part of what we discover in Revelation 7 is God's passion for the nations: for Jews, for Gentiles, Americans, South Asians, for the Congolese, for everyone. And everyone means everyone. Of course, the Jews have been given special priority in the Scripture. But the Gospel now extends to all people. Or as verse 9 puts it: "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." Paul said it like this in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

2. Application #2: Though the multitude is innumerable, God individually seals each one of us. In other words, Revelation 7 reminds us that God protects us and cares for us individually.

- a. "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" (7:3). He knows each of us by name. He has a white robe for you, washed in the blood of the Lamb. "God numbers, knows, and cares for his own; he knows each of his sheep by name" (Schreiner, *Revelation*, 621; cf. John 10:3).

3. Application #3: Revelation 7 reminds us that, no matter how bad things get, Jesus wins. And we will triumph in Him.

- a. "Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."