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Every Tribe and Tongue.

By Greg Jao · Shared by Tommy Lee

What John saw at the end of the Bible, and why it is happening now.

A note from Tommy. Resource Global's Founding Chairman, Greg Jao, taught our cohorts around the world on the importance of global community. I wanted to share some of his thoughts in a two part post. And a special congratulations to our dear friend and leader Greg on being named President and Publisher of InterVarsity Press.



Greg Jao, President and Publisher of InterVarsity Press. Adapted from a teaching given to the Resource Global community.

Being on a call with believers from Seattle, Sao Paulo, Cluj, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Jakarta, Jaipur, and a dozen other cities is one of the best reminders I know of what the church is supposed to be. It looks, in a small way, like something John saw at the very end of the Bible.

I have been teaching through the book of Revelation, and there is a pattern in it worth noticing. Again and again, John hears one thing, and then he turns to look and sees something far greater than he expected. In Revelation 5 he hears that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Son of David, is worthy to open the scroll. That is a strong and very Jewish image. But when John turns to look, he does not see a lion. He sees a Lamb who was slain, the one who died for the sins of the world.

The same thing happens in Revelation 7. John hears about 144,000 people, twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. He hears the renewal of one nation. But then he turns to look, and what he sees is so much bigger. Revelation 7:9 says he saw a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and worshiping the Lamb. That is the direction the whole story of Scripture is moving.

A promise that started small

The story starts small. In Genesis 12, God calls one man, Abram, and makes him a promise. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, and you will be a blessing. Then God widens it. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

For a long time I heard that preached as a story about the Jewish people being a blessing to the nations, and in many ways that has been true. But the fuller meaning is that all the peoples of the earth get folded into Abram's family. The Gentiles are brought in, so that the people of God end up reflecting the whole diversity of the globe. That is good news for almost everyone on a call like ours. Most of us are not Jewish by birth, and yet through what Christ did on the cross, we are all children of Abraham. When believers from that many nations gather to worship, God's promise to Abram is being kept in front of our eyes. That is the trajectory of the whole Bible, a straight line from Genesis 12 to Revelation 7.

The Old Testament already saw it coming

The Old Testament kept pointing toward this. Isaiah 2 says that in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house will be lifted above every other mountain, and all the nations will stream to it, saying, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, so he can teach us his ways. By Isaiah 60 you have the nations bringing their glory and their honor to God, the camels of Kedar, the glory of

Lebanon, the wealth of the peoples carried in as tribute. Jeremiah 3:17 says the same thing, and so do Zechariah 8 and Zechariah 14. The picture is of Jerusalem becoming the center of gravity for the whole world, because the Lord reigns there, and the nations streaming in to worship him.

Then Jesus started doing it

This was never only an Old Testament hope. Jesus started making it real. He healed the servant of a Roman centurion, a man from the very army that was occupying and oppressing Israel (Matthew 8). He stopped to talk with a Samaritan woman at a well, and she became one of the first evangelists to her own town (John 4). He said plainly, I have other sheep that are not of this fold, and I must bring them also (John 10:16).

Then came Pentecost. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes and the first believers start speaking in the languages of the people gathered there, from places we would now call Iraq and Iran, across to North Africa, over to Rome. The early church was given the ability to speak to people in their own heart language. Many of you on our calls speak three or four languages and are using English only because it is the one I can speak. But every one of us has a heart language, the one we dream in, the one we pray in, the one that reaches all the way down. God gave the early church the ability to speak into exactly that.

This is one of the things that makes the Christian faith different. In Islam, the only fully authoritative way to read the Quran is in Arabic, so enormous effort and money go into teaching Arabic around the world. Christians do close to the opposite. We spend hundreds of millions of dollars translating the Bible into language after language, because we believe God delights in that diversity and wants every person to understand the gospel in the language of their own heart.

The pattern keeps going. Peter is sent to a Gentile named Cornelius (Acts 10). Paul writes Galatians and Romans, and in the West we often read them as nothing more than a lesson on justification by faith. But the reason Paul had to work that doctrine out was a very practical problem between cultures. Jews and Gentiles were coming into the same church, and he had to explain how a person could follow the Messiah without first becoming Jewish. The deep theology grew out of a real need to become one body together. And it all lands in Revelation 7:9 and Revelation 21, where the glory and honor of the nations are carried into the New Jerusalem.

The story we are standing inside

This is the story we are living in right now. Every time believers from that many places gather in one room, or on one call, a little more of Revelation 7 comes true. God really is keeping the promise he made to Abram all those years ago. And once you start to see the church that way, it

changes how you treat the believer sitting next to you, especially the one who is nothing like you. That is where I want to go next.

Read Part 2: Why We Need Each Other

Greg Jao

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Greg Jao wrote this article for Resource Global. Tommy Lee shares it here on tommyplee.ai.

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