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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.

—Exodus 14:30–31

Seeing That Great Work

On the other side of the Red Sea, God shows us Israel's heart: the people feared the Lord.

Remember the last time God showed us Israel's heart? When the wilderness had shut them in? When they had lifted up their eyes and had seen Egypt and death marching after them? Here was their heart then: the people were sore afraid (Ex. 14:10).

Those two hearts sound similar: sore afraid/feared the Lord. But they are very, very, very different. To be sore afraid is unbelief. To fear the Lord is faith. "The people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses."

What had happened in between to make the sore afraid fear the Lord? What had happened to make unbelief faith?

It can be said in one word, but there is no hurry. We will come to the word, which is marvelous and wonderful and makes God's people sing. But for now, let us linger a moment on the far side of the sea with Israel and see what they saw. Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. The sea, which had swallowed the Egyptians, now spat them out.

What Israel saw was the end of the Egyptians. Pharaoh and his host did not meet their end when the water of the Nile turned to blood. The end of the Egyptians was not with the frogs or the flies or the boils. The end of the Egyptians

was not even with the death of the firstborn. The ten plagues broke Egypt and destroyed them. But those plagues were not their end. The end of the Egyptians was here at the Red Sea, where God destroyed them. This was that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians and which Israel saw.

And God must do that great work upon the Egyptians, for his people were in Egypt's hand (Ex. 14:30). Egypt, which is sin; Egypt, which is death, had God's people in its hand! So it is for you and for me, who by our fall in Adam are under sin and dead in sin and in Egypt's hand.

How does God take us out of Egypt's hand? "By the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and to enter into the spiritual land of Canaan" (Belgic Confession 34).

And now let us come to the word mentioned before, which is not just a word but a very great truth. It is that great work of God in Jesus Christ that makes the unbeliever believe. It is that great work of God in Jesus Christ that makes the sore afraid fear the Lord. Here is that great work of Jehovah, which we too have seen.

Salvation!

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians.

—AL

Article LIII. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

One more article must be devoted to an explanation of Rev. 20:1–10 before we resume our regular discussion of the development of the fallen king and his kingdom in this dispensation, the period when the devil is bound with respect to Gog and Magog.

An objection might be and is often deduced from the first part of the fifth verse of our chapter. There we read: “the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished.” The objection raised on the basis of these words is quite evident. It is argued that when John says: “the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished,” he practically expresses by implication, that the rest of the dead would live again after the thousand years were finished. The conjunction “until” also in the original denotes a “terminus ad quem,” denotes a limit of time. And, therefore, it is argued, the state of the rest of the dead comes to an end with the close of the thousand years. Then they also shall live again. And, hence, the only possible and sane view is that of the “pre,” who holds that there will be two resurrections, one before and one after the thousand years. At the dawn of the millennium the faithful are raised; after the close of the thousand years the rest of the dead also receive their body.

It may be admitted that this expression of John does not seem easy. The objection raised is apparently a weighty one. At first sight it would actually seem as if the sentence of John concerning the rest of the dead must needs be completed, so that he really intended to say: “the rest of the dead shall live after the close of the thousand years.” And, therefore, we may begin by admitting that this is a difficult expression, indeed.

However, from the outset we may call your attention to the evident fact, that the difficulty is by no means solved in the manner of the millennialist. This would be the case if the sentence read: “the rest of the dead were not raised till the thousand years were finished.” Then, indeed, the matter were beyond dispute. But this is not the case. John says: “the rest of the dead lived not.” And this sentence cannot simply be completed by saying: “but they shall live when the thousand years are finished,” for the simple reason that they shall never live. The rest of the dead include the wicked. If the millennialist will be consistent, he, therefore, will have to maintain that also the wicked shall live again. Not merely that they shall be raised, that they shall receive their bodies again; about this there is no dispute among us. But they shall live! All the more impossible this interpretation becomes when we consider that the word “live” must needs be taken in the fullest sense of the word. It expresses nothing less than real, true, full, eternal life. For it is used of the saints in the same connection. The saints that had been faithful, so we read, lived, and they reigned with Christ a thousand years. No one will doubt the fact that in that connection the word is used in the literal sense, and that it denotes a life of glory. And, therefore, if you will complete the sentence of John concerning the rest of the dead, you must be consistent and maintain that after the thousand years also the wicked shall live in that true sense, even as the saints. The simple context is this: “the saints that have been faithful lived; the rest of the dead lived not; but they shall also live at the end of the thousand years.”

Evidently, this is impossible.

There is no one among us that would maintain this. It is evident that the rest of the dead shall never live, even though they receive their body again. And, therefore, this cannot be maintained.

But, then, it must also be admitted that it is best not to let John say more than he actually does say in this connection. The expression John employs is purely negative. He says: “the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished.” He does not actually say that they shall live after the completion of this period. Neither, let it be clearly seen, is this necessarily implied in the words. John receives a vision. The vision calls his attention to the state of the souls of the saints that have been faithful and that have been beheaded for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. These faithful saints he sees. He beholds their state. And he observes how their state is one of glory. They reign with Christ in glory. But the other dead, those that have not been faithful, that have not held the testimony of Jesus, John evidently does not see. He merely says: “they lived not.” All during that period that the saints live with Christ without the body and dwell in glory, the wicked are not seen. They are dead.

Nothing more is said. And nothing more need be said. It is exactly by the attempt to complete the words of John, so that we make him say things which he does not actually say, that the difficulty is created. And, therefore, also this difficulty falls away. The reference at any rate is not to the resurrection after the millennium. Such a resurrection is not even suggested.

And here we close our discussion of the passage. Its interpretation was necessary to obtain a general view of the character of the new dispensation with a view to the development of the fallen king and his kingdom. Once more I wish to emphasize that I did not write so elaborately on this single passage because I think the millennium-question pure and simple the heart and soul of the premillennial view, or because I am

of the opinion that any one ought to be molested in our church who believes in a premillennial coming of Christ.

I do not.

It is conceivable that one believes in a premillennial coming of Christ and in a literal millennium without consistently adopting all the principles of premillennialism. I well remember how the question of “het duizendjarige rijk” was often the topic of discussion among our common people in the Netherlands, as well as in our own country. Many were inclined to take Rev. 20:1–10 literally and to believe in a millennium. Were they ever molested because of this?

Not at all.

But a far different question is raised when the whole doctrine of premillennialism with all its implications is adopted by one who promised that he would never teach any doctrine not in harmony with our reformed standards. For that view has fundamentally but little in common with the specific teachings of our confession. According to it Israel and the Church are two entirely different conceptions, they have essentially nothing in common. Israel is the main thing. They are the people. Jesus is their king, and their king alone, their king to all eternity. And the church constitutes a mere episode in history. It is something thrown in between. It is gathered rather accidentally because the Jews rejected their King. And while the Jews are in captivity Jesus gathers His Church. Of that church He is Head. He is not its King and never will be. The church goes to heaven. The Jews go to Palestine. And into all eternity they shall be two, essentially different peoples.

Thus it is taught in premillennial circles. Thus it was adopted in Maranatha.

If you accept it, your connection between the O.T. and the N.T. is simply gone. And with it your basis for your covenant-idea. If premillennialism is true, we are no covenant-people. He that accepts these theories must turn baptist, will eventually turn baptist, if he only is consistent.

Let no one speak lightly of these things, as if they mattered but little. You may as well speak

lightly about the maintenance of our distinctly reformed principles. Alas! that this is actually done sometimes by men that ought to know better. It is said, that all these little differences matter but little. We ought not to quarrel about them! Our church is so small in numbers that we cannot afford to quarrel! Let us be up and doing and labor for the coming of the kingdom!

Sure! This is beautiful talk. Talk that sometimes easily appeals. But after all it consists of nothing but a few vague and sweeping statements that cannot stand the test of investigation. Surely, we must not forget to do something. We agree when it is said that it is deplorable that in our little church there must be so much quarreling. But let us be specific and state what we deplore. I deplore that in our little church a man has the sad courage to teach doctrines that are radically opposed to our reformed doctrine, officially expressed in our standards. I deplore that a man, even after his attention has been called to the fact

and after his teachings have been condemned as anti-reformed by an entire synod simply continues to make propaganda for these very doctrines that have been condemned. I deplore that such course of action, which is not only dogmatically incorrect, but also ethically unjustifiable, can still find supporters.

If this be allowed and approved; if this can find defenders that are of the same convictions; or if these things must be called little matters that ought not to cause so much quarreling; well, then, let us be open and honest about it. Let us set aside our standards. Let us no more sign the formula of subscription as office-bearers in the church. Let us cast away all discipline of doctrinal matters, and let us introduce freedom of teaching and preaching without limits.

Thanks to God, this is not the general condition of the church to which we belong. We wish to maintain our reformed principles, and as a heritage dear to us we wish to watch over them.

—Holland, Mich.

