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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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And thou shalt take the ram of the consecration, and seethe his flesh in the holy place. And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And they shall eat those things wherewith the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them: but a stranger shall not eat thereof, because they are holy. And if ought of the flesh of the consecrations, or of the bread, remain unto the morning, then thou shalt burn the remainder with fire: it shall not be eaten, because it is holy. And thus shalt thou do unto Aaron, and to his sons, according to all things which I have commanded thee: seven days shalt thou consecrate them.

—Exodus 29:31–35

The Holy Meal

The seventh and final ceremony by which the priests would be consecrated was the holy meal. The holy meal consisted of the remaining bread and flesh of the ram of the peace offering. After the ram's flesh was boiled in the courtyard of the tabernacle, Aaron and his sons would eat the holy meal before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. No part of the meal could be shared with strangers—which here means other Israelites—and any food left over must be burned.

What was the meaning of the holy meal? First, the holy meal signified that God brought his people to his table in covenant fellowship through the blood of the offering. The tabernacle of the congregation was literally *the tent of meeting*. It was the tent-house where God dwelled—not because God needed a house in which to dwell but because his people needed a place where they could meet with him. The door of the tabernacle of the congregation testified that there was a way for God's people to enter his house and to live with him. Because the priests were taken from among the people, their eating the holy meal before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation signified that God's people had covenant fellowship with their God. And by eating the very sacrifice by whose blood their sins were purged away, the priests testified that the people had covenant

fellowship with God only through the blood of atonement. Thus the holy meal richly testified the glad tidings of the gospel that we have fellowship with God through Christ.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. (Heb. 10:19–22)

Second, the holy meal signified that God feeds and nourishes his hungry people through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The priests of the Old Testament could have had their choice of all manner of food. God had sent his people forth from Egypt with flocks and herds of animals, ready for the slaughter. But not a single animal out of that abundance of food could feed the priests in their holy meal. Only the flesh of the ram of consecration and the bread of their peace offering could satisfy and nourish the priests. By that Old Testament type the Lord teaches us yet today that nothing in this world can feed and nourish us unto everlasting life: not man's treasures, not man's philosophy, not man's worship, not man's doctrine, not man's leisure. The only food that

feeds and nourishes and establishes our hearts is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. (Heb. 13:8–10)

Third, the holy meal signified that only those appointed by God could eat with him. The holy meal was to be eaten only by the priests and no one else. Any remaining food was to be burned. And why? Because no man takes to himself the honor of being a priest who eats with God. God alone appoints men to such honor, according to his eternal will and good pleasure. And whom has it pleased God to appoint? Our Lord Jesus Christ! In Christ alone by faith alone the child of God eats with his God.

And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. (Heb. 5:4–5)

When the seven days of the seven ceremonies of consecration were finished, the high priest entered into his office of mercy for God's needy people. Now by faith behold our high priest, Jesus Christ!

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14–16)

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Article CLI: The New King and His Kingdom: Prophecy and Israel's Restoration (continued)

“And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel.”—Rev. 7:4

The seventh chapter of the book of Revelation contains two sections. The first of these speaks of the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand of the children of Israel; the second of an innumerable multitude, gathered out of all nations, standing in glory before the throne of God and the Lamb. It is especially the first half of the chapter, particularly Vss. 4–8, that concern us in this connection, because it is that portion of the Word of God that is frequently explained as referring to Israel as a nation, or at least to the elect of Israel in distinction from the general multitude of the people of God that are gathered from every nation and tongue and tribe.

Let us first of all try to obtain some conception of the context in which this seventh chapter occurs and of the significance of the passage in the book of Revelation.

It is the moment between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals. In connection with the opening of the six preceding seals terrible things have been revealed, the judgments of God have been shown in operation in the world. On the other hand, things of a still more dreadful nature are to come with the opening of the seventh seal, that is to reveal itself as seven trumpets. Already at the close of chapter VI, at the sight of the effect the opening of the sixth seal has in the earth, the inhabitants of the world are represented as asking the question of despair: “Who is able to stand?” But this question will most naturally arise, even in the minds of the people of God, when the contents of the seventh seal will be

revealed. For these will be more terrible than the former things. When these things come to pass, who shall be able to stand? It is to this question that the seventh chapter gives the answer. It assures us that the servants of the living God shall stand, shall not be overcome for the simple reason that their God has sealed them. And it first of all gives us a graphic picture of the sealing of the servants of God in order then to show us these servants in their final victory before the throne of God and the Lamb.

Now, it is claimed that in the first section of this chapter, where the picture is given of the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand servants of God, we have a reference to the children of Israel in the literal sense of the word. Neither is it difficult to see the reason for this interpretation. In the first place, it is the children of Israel that are mentioned. “And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel.” And what is more, the tribes of the children of Israel are all enumerated. Twelve thousand out of every tribe are sealed, and every tribe from which these servants of God are sealed is mentioned by name. And it is claimed that it would be extremely strange to have the tribes of Israel enumerated and mentioned by name in a passage that is designed to refer to the Church. Besides, thus it is claimed, in the passage that follows, Vss. 9–17 of the same chapter, we have mention of an innumerable multitude. These latter are evidently not the same as the one hundred and forty-four thousand that are referred to in the beginning of the chapter. For in the one instance it is a definite number that is mentioned,

in the other it is an innumerable multitude. These cannot be the same people. And, therefore, it is most natural to explain that in the first part of the chapter John refers to Israel in the literal sense of the word, while in the latter half the reference is to the Church. And thus we have in this chapter a plain indication that we may expect a special future for Israel, whether we believe that Israel as a nation is still to be restored or whether we expect a special harvest from them for the Kingdom of God or the new dispensation.

But in spite of all these arguments to the contrary we are still convinced that also in the first half of the chapter the reference is to spiritual Israel, to the people of God in general, and that the innumerable multitude of the latter half and the one hundred and forty-four thousand of the first half of the chapter are one and the same multitude. Only in the first part of the chapter they are viewed from the point of view of their being in the world, in the midst of tribulation; in the second half they are pictured in glory. First of all it should be remembered that the book of Revelation is an apocalyptic book, full of signs and symbols. If it should be considered strange that a passage like the one now under consideration could refer to the Church, it might be judged stranger still that in the book of Revelation we should meet with so literal a passage referring to the nation of Israel, or to the elect from the Jews. To interpret the passage as referring to spiritual Israel certainly is in harmony with the general character and contents of this book of Scripture. In the second place we would point to the fact that in this same book very frequently elements occur derived from the worship of the Old Testament but to be interpreted in a spiritual sense. Jerusalem and the temple, altars, candlesticks and pillars all are mentioned in the book of Revelation, yet never with a literal meaning. In the third place, these sealed ones are called "the servants of our God." And they are sealed, evidently, against the tribulation of this present time. Now, in the first place, it surely does not do justice to the expression "servants of our God" to limit it to Israel as a nation. And secondly, it

would be strange to find that only the Jews were sealed against the tribulation that is to come with the blowing of the seven trumpets. Besides, close examination of the passage shows that the tribes are mentioned in a haphazard manner. Ephraim is not mentioned, neither is Dan. Joseph, who, as we know, was in the old dispensation represented by the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, occurs in the passage as a separate tribe. And although this is the case, still Manasseh is also mentioned. A literal interpretation would, of course, be obliged to explain these difficulties. If we must expect a special future for the Jews, are Ephraim and Dan excluded from this future? Besides, how is it to be harmonized that from Joseph twelve thousand are sealed, while the text states that another twelve thousand are to be sealed from Manasseh? Finally, we object that a strictly literal interpretation would also oblige us to explain the number literally, and to accept that from every tribe here mentioned strictly twelve thousand are to participate in the glory of Israel and therefore are sealed with the seal of the living God. But this is so plainly against the evident purpose of the twelve times occurring number that it needs no argument to refute it. The number 144,000 or $12 \times 12,000$ is so plainly schematic and symbolic, that it deprives the entire passage of its significance to deny this.

And, therefore, we hold that also in this passage there is no reference to a special future for Israel in the literal sense of the word. The passage does not speak of Israel as a nation, nor even of the elect of the Jews, but of the people of God in general as they are in the world. They are essentially the same as those that are pictured as an innumerable multitude in the latter part of the chapter. Nor is it difficult to discern the reason why in the first section they are represented by the definite number 144,000, while in the second part they appear as an innumerable multitude. One hundred and forty-four thousand plainly occurs here as containing twelve times twelve. It is to emphasize this that the twelve tribes of Israel are mentioned and that exactly twelve thousand are chosen from every tribe to be sealed

with the seal of the living God. Twelve represents the aggregate of the people of God, of God's elect as they are on earth at any period of history. Using the number in the symbolical sense we may say that there are twelve thousand people of God on earth at any time of the world's history. There are twelve patriarchs, twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twice twelve elders before the throne. Twelve is the number that signifies the people of God as they are in the world at any period. That this number here occurs as multiplied by a thousand signifies in the first place that they are the elect of God, for the number ten refers to the fulness according to God's counsel. And, secondly, it expresses that there are a large number of people of God in the world. If we remember this, it is not difficult to see why the same people of God appear as a multitude that no man can number after they have entered into the glory of the everlasting Kingdom. For this multitude is the aggregate of all the people of God that have ever lived in the world, all the twelve times twelve thousands that have lived in the world added together, thus constituting a great multitude. Small the number of the people of God may seem when numbered at any period in the history of

this world in comparison with the whole of the earth's inhabitants. But never should we forget that the church triumphant is continually growing, the multitude before the throne is swelling in numbers from age to age, till it shall appear as a crowd which cannot be numbered by any man.

And thus we conclude that in the New Testament we find no mention of a special future for the nation of Israel in distinction from the Church of the living God. Neither Christ nor his apostles speak of such a special future. In the new dispensation there is no difference between Jew and Greek. All are saved in the same way, by the same Christ, through the same faith, and enter into the same glory to constitute the same innumerable multitude. And also Rev. 7 speaks, not of Israel as a nation or of a separate number of elect from Israel, but of the people of God in general, as they are sealed in the midst of tribulation and as, because of this seal, they shall persevere till the end and enter into glory everlasting.

And it is in the light of the New Testament that we must read and interpret the prophecies concerning the future of Israel in the Old Testament.

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