

144,000 AND THE GREAT MULTITUDE

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THE 144,000 THEIR TRIUMPHS AND REWARD STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

NUMBER TWENTY--ONE

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In the vision of the four angels holding in check the symbolic winds of the earth till the sealing message has done its work, the prophet hears a voice giving the number sealed. "And I heard the number of them which were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel." Revelation 7:4. The following verses describe the sealing of twelve thousand out of each of the twelve tribes.

We must not forget that the sealing message is located between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals, or just before the second advent of Christ. The prophecy under consideration, therefore, meets its fulfillment many generations after the dispersion of Israel, when the identity of the twelve tribes has long since become impossible. Even at the beginning of the Christian era, the tribes had so completely lost their identity that they were indistinguishable because of generations of intermarriage, captivity, and persecution.

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

The only conclusion possible is that our text applies to spiritual and not to literal Israel. While it is impossible for human beings to divide Christians into twelve divisions, according to their characteristics, Christ, the supreme Head of the church, knows where every member of His body belongs; and in the book of life, or family record, they are doubtless enrolled under the tribe or nation to which they belong.

The term "Israel" had its origin the night Jacob wrestled with the angel, when, because his character was changed, God changed his name from Jacob, the deceiver and supplanter, to Israel, a prince of God and overcomer--one who prevails with God and man. (See Genesis 32:24-28.)

The terms "Israel" and "Christian" are therefore synonymous, for all true Israelites are Christians and all true Christians are Israelites, or sons of God. Of course, all who claim to be Christian are not Christians; likewise, all who claim to be Israelites are not princes of God, as

Paul declared: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel," and "he is not a Jew, which is outwardly:...but he is a Jew which is one inwardly." Romans 9:6; 2:28,29.

In Romans 11:17-26, the true Israel of all ages is represented as a tame and fruitful olive tree, and the Gentiles as a wild olive tree. Some of the natural branches, or the descendants of Abraham, were broken off because of unbelief, and branches from the wild olive tree were grafted into their place; these, partaking "of the root and fatness" of the Israel stock, yield the fruit of the tame olive, "contrary to nature." The conclusion of Paul's argument is, "and so all Israel shall be saved."

THE TWELVE TRIBES

In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul declared: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29. He also stated that all who are now creatures in Christ Jesus are of "the Israel of God." Chapter 6:15,16.

That the church of Christ, even in its militant state, is divided in to twelve tribes, or nations, is evident from the opening statement of the epistle of James. "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings." That the contents of this letter were intended for spiritual Israel and not for the Jews is evident even to the casual reader. The fifth chapter is essentially a last--day prophecy and shows that the epistle was written for the special benefit of the church of the last generation, which would witness the return of Christ to establish His kingdom of glory.

The evidence is also conclusive that the church triumphant will retain this twelve-tribe division. In answer to Peter's question, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?" Jesus answered; "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Matthew 19:27,28.

The celestial city, the New Jerusalem, through whose pearly gates will pass the redeemed of all ages (Revelation 22:14) regardless of their earthly nationality, rests upon twelve foundations on which are emblazoned the names of the twelve apostles who will reign as judges, or kings, over the twelve nations of overcomers in earth's warfare. (See Revelation 21,22.)

The saved of all ages are declared to be "so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable." Hebrews 11:12. On the other hand, the final sealing message gathers and seals 144,000, divided into twelve companies of 12,000 each. Who are they? and what is their relation to the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes?

OCCUPY HIGH POSITIONS

This special company became qualified to stand next to Christ because of the trying experience through which they have passed in their warfare with the hosts of evil in the final desperate charge against the remnant of the church militant. (See Revelation 12:17) In ruling

themselves and conquering sin, they have demonstrated their ability to rule. They have gotten the victory over every known sin, and are "without fault before the throne of God." But few saints in the world's history have ever reached such a high standard of perfection of character and knowledge of His truth. Their loyalty to the principles of God's government has been tested to the utmost, and is above question. They can now be entrusted with responsibility in the kingdom of Christ and of the twelve nations of Israel.

The Christian church began its history under the leadership of twelve men, who, during the ten days of prayer, study and confession of sin in the upper room, reached a standard of perfection in harmony with their perfection of faith. They had "the faith of Jesus." They were "of one accord" for the first time in their lives, and had gotten the victory over every known sin, so that they no longer grieved the Holy Spirit, who sealed them "unto the day of redemption." (See Ephesians 4:30) Since they were sealed for the kingdom, the Holy Spirit was given to them without measure, and Pentecost was the result. The early rain followed the upper-room experience that brought to them the seal of God's approval.

THE GREAT OUTPOURING

The early rain was but a local shower compared with the latter rain which is poured out on all flesh to ripen the gospel grain for the final harvest. The reaping message is to go to "every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." (See Revelation 14:6-14) As twelve men were sealed for leadership by the Spirit in the beginning of the gospel proclamation under the early rain, twelve groups of men, of 12,000 each, will be sealed by the Spirit for Leadership in giving the Loud cry during the latter rain. As the 144,000 reach the standard of perfection of character corresponding to their perfection of faith, "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," they are sealed for the kingdom, and go forth to give the loud cry that calls God's people out of spiritual Babylon and completes the gospel harvest. (Revelation 18:1-5.)

The 144,000 are declared to be "the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb." Revelation 14:4. In ancient Israel each farmer was required to bring the first sheaf of his crop to the sanctuary and present it to the priest. This was called the "first fruits" of the harvest and was dedicated to the sanctuary and the service of the priests and was deposited "before the alter of the Lord." He was then privileged to put in the sickle for the final harvest. The "first fruits" was only a small part of the entire crop. (See Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 25:10; Deuteronomy 26:1-11.)

All the services of the Mosaic sanctuary were typical of the plan of salvation and the priestly service of Christ. The offering of the first fruits must have an antitype in the reaping of the final gospel harvest. "The harvest is the end of the world," declared Jesus. Just before the world-harvest is gathered and when it is "white already to harvest," a "first fruits" sheaf will be gathered and presented to the priest of the heavenly sanctuary to be dedicated to His service. The "first fruits" of the antitypical harvest are plainly declared to be the 144,000; this will be the first sheaf only of the entire gospel crop. In the type, the "first fruits" was not only the first in point of time but also in quality. The best of the harvest must be selected, or

"the choice fruits." Thus the 144,000 are not only the first of the final harvest, but its choice fruits; for "they are without fault before the throne of God."

THE INNUMERABLE HOSTS

After describing the 144,000, the revelator continued; "After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Revelation 7:9,10.

Here is described the remainder of the final harvest. Their knowledge, experience, and tests of loyalty are far less than the standard reached by the 144,000, who are qualified for a special work as "kings and priests" unto God and the Lamb.

Just before the reaping of the vast harvest of the earth, the 144,000 or the "first fruits," are presented to Christ, the great High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, and dedicated to a special service before the throne of God. "Therefore, are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." Revelation 7:15.

This in accord with the promise Christ makes to those who accept the Laodicean message, and are purified by it. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

Surely the Lord holds out a glorious reward to those who accept the sealing message and reach the high standards required for enumeration in the special company who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, go with Him "whithersoever He goeth," and assist Him in the administration of the kingdom of glory. Is any sacrifice too great for such a priceless privilege?

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