

Brother Benson, as the root of the word 'Hebrew' indicates 'one who crosses over', or 'those on the other side' (usually of a river), among many other meanings.

According to *Strong's Concordance*, a Syrian was an Aramean. This being so, applying Deuteronomy 26:5, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father", to the patriarchs reveals that Abraham would have been an Aramean. This poses further problems, for if Abraham was an Aramean, surely he would have spoken that dialect. Whence the change from Aramean to Hebrew?

Finally, the article "Archaeological evidence for the existence of Jesus" (Mar. 2003, p. 102) reveals the importance of Aramaic, especially as this is the first archaeological evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ. The article refers to one expert as stating that "The forms of the letters [Aramaic] are consistent with the period, and the actual usage of Aramaic is too".

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#### Comment

I think we should be careful about welcoming the fact that an Aramaic manuscript of the New Testament does not include the term 'demons' in Matthew 8:28-34 and Mark 5:1-20. This implies that every one of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament is corrupt in this respect, surely an unacceptable conclusion. Also, there are other references to 'demons' in the New Testament, including in the Luke account of the same miracle (8:26-40), and we surely cannot dispose of them all on the same basis.

Regarding the idea that Abraham was an Aramean, Aram, the founder of the nation of Aram, or Syria as we know it, was the son of Shem (Gen. 10:22). Eber, the ancestor of Abraham, was a descendant of another son of Shem, Arphaxad (11:10-14). The term 'Aramean' or 'Syrian' is therefore not applicable to Abraham by virtue of his descent.

Regarding Deuteronomy 26:5, this surely does not refer to Abraham but to Jacob. The passage reads: "A Syrian [Aramean] ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous". Abraham did not sojourn in Egypt and become a great nation, though he did visit once, nor is there any record of him being "ready to perish". The facts fit Jacob, who lived for many years in Syria and on returning to Canaan feared for his life at the

hands of Esau. He is not called a Syrian because it was his native tongue but because of his residence there prior to entering the land again.

Though he was not a descendant of Aram, Jacob's father-in-law Laban is referred to as a Syrian (Gen. 31:20), presumably because his family had been resident there for over a hundred years. It should be noted that, when an altar was made on the border between Syria and Canaan, Jacob gave it a Hebrew name and Laban a Syrian name, showing that at this stage there was a distinction between the two languages (31:47). It seems reasonable to suppose that Abraham and his family, as wanderers in Canaan, preserved Hebrew, the language of their forefather Eber, whereas the family of Nahor, Abraham's brother (Laban's family), adopted Aramaic, the language of the country in which they became resident.—

*T.B.*

## Ezekiel's visions of the Millennium

### Will there be a literal temple in the Kingdom?

In regard to the design of the temple of Ezekiel's vision, I found Brother Geoff Cave's articles very convincing. However, I share Brother Trevor Hughes' view ([Feb. 2003, p. 51](#)), based on Ezekiel 43:10,11, that, conditional on their repentance, the temple and its ordinances were for Ezekiel's contemporaries to institute, rather than for a distant Messianic age. There is another line of evidence, one aspect of which Brother Hughes brought forward. It concerns the "ordinances" of this temple, and, I suggest, becomes very compelling when examined in detail.

The vision clearly involves the restitution of the Law of Moses (with some modifications), which itself is an intrinsic part of the Sinai covenant, together with a Levitical priesthood, sacrifices and circumcision. When we come to the inspired writings of the apostles we find that all of these things are spoken of as having come to an unequivocal end.

Consider first the Sinai, or old, covenant. In 2 Corinthians 3:6,7 Paul refers to the new covenant, and then, in contrast, "the ministration of death". That ministration had a "glory", but it has been eclipsed by that of the new covenant, and is spoken of as "that which is done away"

(v. 11). And what could be clearer than Hebrews 8:13 concerning the Sinai covenant: “that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away”? Surely no prospect here of revival in the age to come.

Of the Law specifically, we read of “what the law could not do” (Rom. 8:3), and that Christ “abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Eph. 2:15), and, perhaps most dramatically conclusive, of God through Christ “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us . . . *nauling it to his cross*” (Col. 2:14).

And with the Law go the sacrifices, as Brother Hughes indicated, for “this man . . . offered one sacrifice for sins for ever”, and “where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:12,18). How can such an institution and the sacrifices it involved, especially sin offerings, be revived without devaluing the work of Christ? The picture is even more incongruous if ‘the prince’ in Ezekiel is considered to be the Messiah. We would then have the sinless and by now immortalised Christ, by whose death “we . . . received the atonement” (Rom. 5:11), making sin offerings for the people “to make reconciliation [atonement, RV]” for them, and also making a sin offering for himself (Ezek. 45:17,22).

In response to what Brother Hughes wrote about sacrifices, Brother Cave replied: “The purpose of animal sacrifices was never to take away sins”; and said that they will be reintroduced merely as a “visual aid” to teach about sin and the sacrifice of Christ. Yet they are repeatedly referred to as sin offerings in Ezekiel’s vision, and Leviticus informs us that, when offered by a man in relation to a *specific* sin, “the priest shall make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him” (Lev. 4:31). It was for this reason they had to be offered “continually” (Heb. 10:1,2). The supremacy of Christ’s one sacrifice is that it is effectual to take away *all* sins for those who come to God through him. Moreover, neither we nor the pagans of the first century needed animal sacrifices to convince us about sin and the efficacy of our Lord’s sacrifice, so why should the mortals in the age to come?

I suggest that Paul, in using two phrases drawn from the Old Testament, “acceptable unto God” and “for a sweetsmelling savour”, points in the direction of what will be the sacrifices of the age to come, as they are now: “present your

bodies a living sacrifice”, “giving of thanks” (Rom. 12:1, Eph. 5:2,4). Or, as we read in Hebrews 13:16: “to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased”.

The Levitical priesthood likewise was established within the Law and hence passed away with it. Though a little obscure in places in the AV, Hebrews 7:11-28 supports this conclusion. Because of the Melchisedec priesthood of Christ a change in the law was made a “necessity” (v. 12). The Levitical priesthood, being by physical descent, is described as made “after the law of a carnal commandment” (v. 16), of which it is then said: “there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof” (v. 18). There can surely be no place for such a priesthood to be revived, having been replaced by Christ, a priest “after the power of an endless life” (v. 16).

In view of what Paul has to say about circumcision, it seems to me also that the statement in Ezekiel 44:9, “No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor *uncircumcised in flesh*, shall enter into My sanctuary”, though hinting at the spiritual significance of circumcision, places the sanctuary to which it refers in history, not in the age to come. And how could such a place be a house of prayer for all nations? Bringing together Ephesians and Colossians, circumcision, as a requirement, was part of that “middle wall of partition” removed by “the circumcision of Christ”, his death (Eph. 2:14; Col. 2:11). So now, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing” (1 Cor. 7:19).

In Ezekiel’s vision the Passover was also to be kept (45:21), yet “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). This type, like all others relating to the first coming of Christ, has been fulfilled and is no longer required.

There are passages which raise questions about the view presented here: the disposition of the land in the later chapters of Ezekiel, and the references to the Feast of Tabernacles in Zechariah 14 and to the Levites in Malachi 3, for example. But, in view of the extensive apostolic testimony set out above, these may have to be seen, as Brother Hughes presents some of them, in a different light, just as some other Old Testament passages are treated in surprising ways by the apostles.

Briefly consider one pertinent example, that of the new covenant. In Jeremiah 31 this is to be made specifically with the house of Israel and

the house of Judah. There is no hint that Gentiles would be included, though doubtless Jews would say they could be if they were circumcised and kept the Law, as did the Judaisers later. But through Paul we find that it is not to be a covenant with the nation as fleshly descendants of Abraham, but with Gentiles and Jews who are “in Christ Jesus” and are *thereby* counted as “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:28,29). And the Judaisers’ view is vehemently rejected.

So will there be a material temple in the age to come? For me that is still an open question. Although there are Old Testament references to a future house of the Lord outside Ezekiel, it is a curious fact that the apostles always write of a spiritual house and never refer to a future material house. We know the phrases: “the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 7:48); “ye are the temple of God” (1 Cor. 3:16); “groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21), etc. The Lord Jesus himself said, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God” (Rev. 3:12), words parallel to the expression, “In my Father’s house are many abiding places” (Jno. 14:2, RV mg.). Encompassing Gentiles, it is, and will be, truly “an house of prayer for all people” (Isa. 56:7).

But if there is to be a material temple as a centre of worship in the age to come, I suggest it will, in one important respect, be different from anything that has gone before. At the death of Jesus the veil of the temple was rent in two from top to bottom. Hebrews 10:19-22 states that the way “into the holiest” (the presence of God) has been opened “by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way . . . through the veil . . . his flesh”. How can a material veil, and everything associated with it under the old covenant, be restored without diminishing what has been provided by the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ?

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In [his letter](#) regarding the question of whether there will be a literal temple centred on animal sacrifice in the Kingdom to come, Brother Trevor Hughes made a case against this idea with insight and good sense, allowing, as he put it, “Scripture its initial meaning within its context of time and place”. The idea of animal sacrifice has been bothersome to me also. Why should this practice be reinstated after the sacrifice of Christ on the cross?

Brother L. G. Sargent, writing in *The Christadelphian* (Vol. 102, 1965, p. 554), quotes Brother Thomas as saying, “Its restoration is certain”. Brother Sargent admits that it is an incongruous idea, but justifies the practice by saying that the mortal population in the Kingdom must have a way of expressing their faith in God by pointing back to the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

Brother Cave’s reply to Brother Hughes is in agreement with Brother Sargent’s view, calling animal sacrifice a visual aid to teach mortals in the Kingdom the seriousness of sin. However, those of mankind who have come to Christ through the centuries have not been required to perform animal sacrifices to remember God’s “unspeakable gift” to man. This ritual, a very large part of the Law, is described by Paul as follows: “Thus the law was a kind of tutor in charge of us [Israel] until Christ should come, when we should be justified through faith; and now that faith has come, the tutor’s charge is at an end” (Gal. 3:24, NEB). In the future, Israel’s faith and repentance will come when they recognise Christ as the Messiah upon his triumphal return.

Brother Cave says that it is inconceivable that nine detailed chapters of Scripture were given in the knowledge that they would never be fulfilled. But the idea is credible when you go back to Ezekiel 40–46 and see that all these things would have come true if Israel had turned back to God upon their return to the land after the exile. The glorious temple would have been rebuilt and Israel would have continued under the Law with God’s blessing until the coming of the Lord. But God’s admonitions went unheeded.

Prophecies are often not written in a linear fashion. (See Matthew 24, where the prophecy is mixed between the time it was given and a future time, making it difficult to interpret.) Ezekiel 47 may be an example of this prophetic arrangement. May I suggest that Ezekiel jumps forward to the future and describes in chapter 47, not the temple depicted in chapters 40–46, but what will happen at the time of the end, when the waters issue out from Jerusalem (Zech. 14:8), and the great healing begins. This “river of water of life” will flow “out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev 22:1), and there will be no temple there, “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” (21:22), of which the temple in Ezekiel 47 is a symbol.

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**Comment**

Though I do not support the idea that the Lord Jesus Christ and the saints will offer sacrifices in the Kingdom, I do not think it is possible to evade the idea that they will be offered by the mortal population in the Kingdom, there is too much Old Testament evidence for it.<sup>1</sup> When we speak of the old covenant being done away in Christ, we mean the obligation to keep perfectly all the laws and ordinances given to Moses at Sinai, especially the ten commandments. We do not mean that the laws which were part of it have all been done away with, leaving us free, for example, to kill, lie and steal. It is not therefore true that "all of these things are spoken of as having come to an unequivocal end". The principles expressed in the ten commandments are still applicable today, and the laws which God gave to regulate the lives of His people Israel in the past will surely be relevant for them in the future when they are a kingdom under Divine rule once more; but this does not mean that the old covenant as such will be reinstated.

The offerings never were effective in their own right to bring forgiveness of sins anyway, their function was always educative, and can equally well be so for mortal Jews in the future age. Regarding the language of Paul's epistles, and of the anonymous letter to the Hebrews, we must consider to whom they were written and why. These epistles did not prohibit Jewish believers from offering sacrifices; their purpose was to stop Jewish believers from trusting in the ordinances of the Law, including sacrifice, to provide salvation. Paul associated himself with Jewish believers who offered sacrifices (Acts 21:26), and still kept the Jewish feasts, which involved sacrifices (18:21). And if Jewish Christians could offer sacrifices in the first century, why should not mortal Jews offer them in the Kingdom?

The suggestion that Old Testament references to a future temple might not be literal because

the New Testament only speaks of a spiritual temple has dangerous implications. On the same basis it could also be suggested that Jerusalem is not the literal capital of the future Kingdom on the grounds that the New Testament only speaks of the future Jerusalem as a spiritual one made up of believers. Using this approach the Church has abandoned the idea of a literal kingdom altogether. The fact that the New Testament uses such things as the temple and Jerusalem in a figurative way does not mean that there is not to be a literal temple and a literal Jerusalem in the Kingdom age.

The comments about the new covenant are peripheral to the matter under discussion, but I feel I must draw attention to the need for care in how we speak of this. The New Testament is not saying that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 applies to believers in Christ in the present age rather than to "the house of Israel" (v. 33) in the Kingdom age as the wording and context in Jeremiah indicate. The prime meaning of the passage obtained from a natural reading of Jeremiah is not overturned by the use of this passage in the New Testament.

The extensive quotations from Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews 8 and 10 are contrasting the old covenant, which did not bring forgiveness of sins, with the new covenant which does. Believers of the gospel in the present age come under this new covenant when they are baptized into Christ, and Jews who accept Christ when he returns will do so then. There is therefore no precedent here for reinterpreting Old Testament references to sacrifices and a temple in the future age on spiritual lines.

Tony Benson

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1. See "Why sacrifice in the millennial age?" (May 1999, p. 204) and "[Sacrifice in the age to come](#)" (Basic Bible principles insert, April 2002).

### Testimony subject index

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