

reaction? Do we find events in the world which relate to Bible prophecy breathtaking? It is easy for us to allow the things of this life to distract us from the signs of the times. We can become like those in the parable of the sower who became choked: “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Lk. 8:14). Despite the breathtaking nature of the signs we may not see them. The words of Christ

warn us of this danger: “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (21:34).

As the image begins to stand astride the continent of Europe we are without excuse. The signs in the earth show that the return of Christ is near. The increased Franco-German cooperation shows that the western leg of the image is consolidating.



Correspondence

Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.

Ezekiel's visions of the Millennium

As Brother Don Harrison says ([Aug. 2003, p. 302](#)), it is hard to imagine that the sacrifices described in Ezekiel 40–48 were intended to be anything but literal. But there are other details in these chapters which I struggle to reconcile with Scripture teaching about life in the age to come. In explaining this, I will try not to go over the ground already covered by recent correspondents.

It is worth noting some of things which we are told about the prince (whom Brother Harrison equates with the Lord Jesus because of the prophecy in Ezekiel 37:25):

- Ezekiel seems to anticipate a number of successive princes—rather than merely one—who are commanded not to oppress Israel (45:8,9)
- Forgiveness of sins still appears to be achieved through animal sacrifices, prepared by the prince (vv. 17-20)
- Even more difficult, the prince is in need of a sin offering himself (v. 22)
- The prince observes new moons and sabbaths (46:1-6), called elsewhere a mere “shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:16,17) compared with the reality of life in Christ, which will be seen in its fullness in the Kingdom age
- A further indication that this prince shares the nature of those he rules over is the fact that he has sons, who stand to inherit property from him (46:16,17)
- If the prince refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, why should he need to be told not to exact property unjustly from his people (v. 18)?

At face value these passages all indicate to me that the prince in question is mortal, capable of sin and in actual need of forgiveness, having children who expect to inherit from him. My mind goes to Zerubbabel, direct descendant of the royal family of Judah and ruler over God's people shortly after Ezekiel's time.

There are similar difficulties regarding the priests Ezekiel describes for us. The Levites here are quite clearly mortal, as they are given instructions concerning the death of members of their family (44:25). Scripture tells us in no uncertain terms that it was this very mortality of the Levitical priesthood which mitigated against it continuing for ever, and which rendered it incapable of saving (Heb. 7:23-25). I therefore find it very hard to see this priesthood being reinstated, especially bearing in mind the overwhelming superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood, which we are privileged to belong to already and which by definition is everlasting in nature (v. 28).

I am aware of ways in which some of the above can be interpreted spiritually, of course; for instance, the Lord is said to have “children” (in the sense of disciples) in Hebrews 2:13. But I suggest that a straightforward reading of Scripture leads us very much towards the view that Ezekiel 40–48 was written primarily for the benefit of the Jews returning to the land after their exile in Babylon. It seems to me that the returning exiles would have applied Ezekiel's words to themselves, therefore, as Brother Tony Fitzgerald suggested ([Jun. 2003, p. 231](#)), leaving on one side any future application or the possibility that they misunderstood what the prophet meant.

Admittedly none of this deals with the consequent problem of chapter 47, which I admit is almost impossible to see as anything other than a Kingdom picture. This is certainly a significant point to bear in mind, and with my current level of understanding I am not able to suggest an answer to this. I confess that I do not find Ezekiel's visions easy.

We are told more than once in Scripture that "in the last days . . . the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob" (Isa. 2:2,3; Mic. 4:1,2). This has not yet been fulfilled, so I have no doubt that there will be a literal temple during the Millennium; I am just not convinced that this is what Ezekiel is talking about.

For the time being, therefore, this is one area of Scripture where I genuinely struggle to reconcile all the information we are given, and I suspect I am not alone. Without wishing to encourage complacency, perhaps we can nevertheless draw comfort from the fact that over the years many brethren and sisters have wrestled with these chapters. Brother Roberts himself, in his excellent article, "True Principles and Uncertain Details" (*The Christadelphian*, May 1898), alludes to some of the difficulties in understanding Divine worship in the temple to come:

"THE GENERAL TRUTH.—That Christ will build the temple of the future age as a house of prayer for all people.

"*Uncertain detail.*—What will be the size of it? What will be the shape of it? There are no grounds for absolute certainty. There are

strong grounds for the view presented by brother Sulley in his temple book: but we should not be justified in making the reception of this view a condition of fellowship. It is sufficient that the general truth is received. Any view that may be entertained as to details is not inconsistent with the general truth".

These are wise words, and this eminently balanced approach is perhaps one for us to adopt too as we seek to increase our understanding of these things. Meanwhile, however, I suggest that the "facts" as understood by Brother Harrison are not as "clearly stated" as we might wish them to be.

Jeremy Thomas
Sale

A reader has sent me a copy of an article by Brother Philip Hinde entitled "Worship in the age to come", which appeared in The Christadelphian in December 1976 (the last of five articles under that title). This presents similar arguments to those in the above letter regarding the identity of the prince, which lead him to the following conclusion:

"If the possibility is admitted that the prince described by Ezekiel could be other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself, then the functions already seen can be accepted as appropriate to a prince, of the house of David, a mortal man acting as the earthly representative of the King among the nation of Israel. In this way he fulfils the functions which were formerly the lot of David's earthly descendants. He leads the worship of the people, organises the provisions of the public offerings, has his own possessions, family and servants, and in recognition of his own needs offers his own sin offering".—T.B.

Israeli anger over Levy's Arafat visit

Israel recently expressed anger at a visit by Prime Minister Tony Blair's special envoy to the Middle East, Lord Levy, to the Palestinian Authority's beleaguered leader Yasser Arafat. Lord Levy went to Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah while visiting Israel to take part in the eightieth birthday celebrations of Shimon Peres, the former prime minister and now Labour opposition leader. A Whitehall source told the *Jewish Chronicle* that Lord Levy had visited Mr Arafat at Prime Minister Blair's behest, saying, "Mr Blair was keen to ensure that Mr Arafat was aware of our views on the Middle East road map and on terrorism. However, this did not cut any ice with Jerusalem, which had just passed a cabinet decision to expel the PA leader". An Israeli embassy spokesperson told the *Jewish Chronicle*: "Every meeting with Yasser Arafat weakens the moderates and the chances for peace negotiations, because they serve only to strengthen Arafat and his position. Every meeting with him causes damage. Anyone who meets Arafat will not get a meeting with Israeli officials".—*Joan Brooks*