



Correspondence

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Ezekiel's visions of the Millennium

The sons of Zadok

In Part 5 of his series "Ezekiel's visions of the Millennium" ([Apr. 2002, p. 134](#)), Brother Geoff Cave, commenting on the idea that Ezekiel 44:15,16 should be treated as a parenthesis about immortal priests in the Kingdom, says: "It is difficult to see any valid reason in the text for insisting that verses 15 and 16 are in parenthesis" (p. 135); and then goes on to say that the verses following these two are also about the sons of Zadok, thus making the whole passage to be about mortal priests.

Let us reconsider the matter. Verse 15 says: "the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they *shall* come near to Me to minister unto Me . . .". Does this not prove them to be immortal? They were faithful during the time of their probation, when the majority went astray. We know that David and Zadok were faithful, and as a result of their faithfulness will be in the Kingdom. Surely this verse is telling us quite plainly that Zadok's sons were also faithful, and that because of their faithfulness they will be in the Kingdom, when they will "stand before" Yahweh.

To "stand before" Yahweh is a very great honour, especially in that wonderful temple in the age to come. Elijah spoke of himself repeatedly as standing before the Almighty: "the LORD God of Israel . . . before Whom I stand" (1 Kgs. 17:1). Brother Cave refers to Phinehas, and he was faithful and "kept the charge" when Israel went astray. His faith was counted to him for righteousness, and we know that he will be in the Kingdom (Num. 25:10,11; Ps. 106:30,31).

So the only conclusion we can come to is that the sons of Zadok will be raised and made immortal because of their faithfulness when Israel went astray. This will be their reward for their faithfulness.

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Reply

Looking just at the evidence presented by Brother Bailey regarding the sons of Zadok, we can conclude that they might well be immortal. However, other details given by Ezekiel point to their being mortal.

Ezekiel 44:15,16 is undoubtedly describing "the sons of Zadok" who "shall stand before Me". The following three verses describe priests who move between the inner court (v. 17) and the outer court (v. 19). These priests cannot be the Levites mentioned earlier in the chapter (vv. 10-14), for "they shall not come near unto Me" (v. 13); they minister only to the people. The only conclusion which can be drawn is that these priests of verses 17-19 are the sons of Zadok, who approach the Lord when in the inner court and minister to the people when in the outer court.

This conclusion is verified by noting that these priests are required to change their garments when moving from the inner to the outer court: "And when they go forth into the utter court, even into the utter court to the people, they shall put off their garments wherein they ministered, *and lay them in the holy chambers*, and they shall put on other garments; and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments" (v. 19). When this is compared with 42:13,14, it is clear that the priests of 44:17-19 are those described by Ezekiel as the sons of Zadok and *not* those described simply as Levites:

"Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, *they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things*: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place is holy. When the priests enter therein, then shall they not go out of the holy place into the utter court, *but there they shall lay*

their garments wherein they minister; for they are holy; and shall put on other garments, and shall approach to those things which are for the people”.

The conclusion is that the priests of 44:17-19 minister before the Lord, are sons of Zadok and are also mortal since, as verses 20-25 clearly show, they marry and can be defiled. This being said, the question remains, Why are they described by Ezekiel as “the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me” (v. 15)? There are three possible answers to this question:

- 1 It may be the literal, mortal descendents of Zadok, many generations down the line, who fulfil this role.
- 2 The sons of Zadok in the past typify these priests.
- 3 There may yet be some future form of testing amongst the nation of Israel after the temple is built, during which these priests will emerge as being fit to minister before the Lord when the rest of the priests go astray.

Geoff Cave

The Roman persecution of Christians

I am writing regarding Brother Elliott’s article, “The Roman attitude to Christianity” (Jul. 2002, p. 275), which I found most interesting, as historical research is not my field.

Perhaps the biggest question I have on this is that of why the Master permitted this relentless persecution across the decades of the various Roman emperors. No doubt the early persecution under Saul forced the spread of the gospel and removed the brethren from Jerusalem, which was to suffer so terribly at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70.

But the persecution continued, and no doubt equally caused the spread of the gospel, for there seems to have been no stopping it once it became deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of true and faithful brethren. What an example to us not to cease to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ! Of this further spread there is little record.

Also, by way of contrast, there is that perplexing determination of Paul to go to Jerusalem and

eventually to Rome. Paul is warned several times not to go, yet persists. Why? Brother John Carter, in his excellent notes on the speeches in Acts, develops some thoughts on this. We begin in Acts 19:21: “After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome”.

In his exhortation to the brethren from Ephesus he said, “And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more” (20:25), which was not to be true as he did visit them again, but in itself is intriguing as to why he should have said it. He had just said, “And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me” (vv. 22,23).

A second warning was given at Tyre: “And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem” (21:4).

The third followed quickly: “And when [Agabus] was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (v. 11).

So why did he go on? Perhaps the most powerful testimony is of course from the Master himself when he appeared to Paul: “And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (23:11). Paul had purposed in the Spirit and the Master had approved. The matter was of such magnitude that the Lord came to His servant Paul.

Brother Carter makes the point that amongst the religions of the Roman Empire few were approved and Judaism was one. Christianity was not. Was Paul, therefore, as a brother with the credentials of a Roman citizen, intent on travelling to Rome to gain from the emperor the formal approval of the State for the gospel?

If so, does it mean that his intention had the Master’s approval, yet ultimately failed? That is the question I ask.

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