

## The Return of the Levitical Priesthood

By Matthew Day

I am going to present some ideas that go against mainstream Christian doctrine. Therefore, I must ask you to set your doctrine aside for a moment. Compare these ideas to Scripture—do not believe or reject without much prayer and study. Several months ago, Father put on my heart a desire to study the Temple and its service. I am far from being finished with that, but I want to share with you the things that I have learned so far. Let's go to Acts:

*After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for **he was under a vow**.*

(Acts 18:18 ESV)

*Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are **under a vow**; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.*

(Acts 21:23-24 ESV)

*Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and **the offering presented for each one of them**. When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,*

(Acts 21:26-27 ESV)

Note that the vow involved the cutting of hair. This would indicate that this is a Nazirite vow which is described in Numbers 6. According to Numbers 6:13-14, at the completion of the Nazirite vow Paul and the four men would have had to bring a sin offering, a burnt offering, and a peace offering.

Wait, Paul brought a sin offering to the Temple? That makes no sense. Isn't Yeshua the final sacrifice? Would not offering animal sacrifices after the death of Yeshua be like trampling on His blood?

**Argument:** Perhaps the vow was done here without the sacrifices.

**Answer:** However, that would prove that Paul did not live in observance of the law, thus defeating the purpose of Paul helping the four men. So, Paul had to have performed the sacrifices in order to prove his point that he lived in observance of the law.

**Argument:** Maybe Paul was just being stupid—maybe he had a lapse of judgment.

**Answer:** But, he had the support of the entire Jerusalem council. Did they all have a lapse in judgment? Not likely, especially considering a Nazirite vow is not something any Jew would do without careful consideration. Paul and his fellows would have known full well what he was getting into.

**Argument:** The most intriguing explanation I have heard for this incident is that this was a confusing transitional period from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ. As I mentioned in my last article, our walk is a process, so we certainly can't expect for the Apostles to have suddenly changed the way they

live right after the death of Yeshua. So, at this point Paul was still doing sacrifices, but as he grew in Christ he would receive new revelation. The destruction of the Temple in 70AD would have marked the end of this transition.

**Answer:** Paul completed his Nazirite vow approximately 57AD. Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 and 2 Corinthians were all written before then. I'm sure you recognize Galatians as a primary proof text against the keeping of the Mosaic Law. If that is indeed the proper interpretation of Galatians, then Paul was taking a step backwards when he took the Nazirite vow. Besides that, the sacrifices should have been the obvious first thing to go in the Mosaic Law. So, this explanation does not work either.

Paul took a Nazirite vow and therefore offered sacrifices. He knew fully well what he was doing. Why did he do it? I would suggest the problem lies in our initial assumption: that Yeshua replaced the animal sacrifices. This actually goes back even farther to a misconception we have about the function of animal sacrifices.

I have found no consensus among Christians as to the role of animal sacrifices in Israel. Some claim that they covered the sins of Old Testament saints until the time came when Yeshua would finally remove them. Some believe that Israel was saved by the keeping of the law and offering of animal sacrifices. Others see the sacrifices as purely symbolic, pointing towards Christ. I've even heard the idea that the animal sacrifices atoned for unintentional sin, but Yeshua had to come to atone for our rebellion. So, what is true?

*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

(Hebrews 10:4 ESV)

*For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.*

(Leviticus 17:11 ESV)

Here is the contradiction that leaves us with the confusing puzzle. The Torah says our sins are atoned for (and thus forgiven--see Lev. 4:20) by animal sacrifices. Hebrews says the opposite. There is a Jewish saying: Two Scriptures contradict, but a third comes to reconcile them.

*For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

(Hebrews 9:13-14 ESV)

The Torah is speaking of this world. In this world the animal sacrifices have a purpose—they allow us to draw near to God in this life. Indeed, the Hebrew word for sacrifice—korban—literally means to “draw near.” Hebrews is speaking of the world to come (see Hebrews 2:5)—the new heavens and new earth. In the world to come, animal sacrifices are useless. Only Yeshua's sacrifice can provide the way for us to draw near in the world to come. The point I am trying to get across is that the animal sacrifices perform a totally different but parallel function to Yeshua's sacrifice. Neither nullifies the other.

Again, the common teaching is that the Melchizadok priesthood replaced the Levitical priesthood. But how can that be when the Melchizadok priesthood came BEFORE the Levitical priesthood. Melchizadok was a priest in Abraham's time. The Levites did not begin their ministry until four hundred years later. How do you explain this? Either the Levitical priesthood replaced the Melchizadok priesthood or the two priesthoods coexisted. The first option makes no sense. With the second option, if the two priesthoods coexisted then, why not now? They can coexist because they perform different functions. One does not contradict the other.

*They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."*

(Hebrews 8:5 ESV)

The heavenly Tabernacle existed even when the earthly Tabernacle was being built. Why the earthly Tabernacle when we have the heavenly one? Because we cannot enter into the heavenly Tabernacle in these earthly bodies. Yes, the earthly Tabernacle is only a shadow of the true Tabernacle in heaven. But so is this world and these bodies. We are living in the shadow. As long as we live in the shadow, the earthly Tabernacle has a place. To what can it be compared? It can be compared to a man away on a long journey who longed for home. So, he carried with him wherever he went a picture of his family. That picture could never replace his actual family. But he loved his family so much that he always carried that flat and shadowy reminder with him. We are the man. The family is the heavenly Tabernacle. The picture is the earthly Tabernacle. We who long for the rebuilding of the Temple long even more for the coming of the heavenly Temple. The earthly Temple is just a way to experience a small taste of that wonderful promise now. We are not content to wait—every bite, every picture, every shadow that we can grab a hold of now we will take until the fullness of our LORD's glory comes.

I want to leave you with a few other Scriptures concerning the priesthood and Temple service.

*And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.*

(Exodus 29:9b ESV)

Just how sure is this promise?

*"For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever." The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me." The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "Have you not observed that these people are saying, 'The LORD has rejected the two clans that he chose'? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their*

*sight. Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them."*

(Jeremiah 33:17-26 ESV)

As we find in Romans 11:29, "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable."

*And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. **And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.** "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.*

(Isaiah 66:20-23 ESV)

In the November 2009 newsletter I mentioned the fact that God has not rejected His people and listed several Scriptures to show this (Jer. 30, 31; Eze. 37; Isa. 11; Rom. 11; Deut. 30). Here again we have the regathering of Israel from the nations. Among them, some will be made priests of the Levitical order.

My final Scripture reference is much too long to post here. Ezekiel 40-48 describes in detail a Temple that has never been built. The Levitical priesthood will serve in this Temple doing all the sacrifices.

This is not a subject to be taken lightly. For those that have not heard, there is a Jewish group known as the Temple Institute that has undertaken the task to prepare for the rebuilding of the third Temple. They have already completed crafting the Menorah, the table for shew-bread, the altar of incense, and most of the other implements. They are currently working on the pinnacle of their work—the altar. If God grants them favor, the altar could be set up in our lifetime. I ask you only to prayerfully consider these things.

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