

# The sons of Zadok and the prince of Ezekiel's prophecy

David Moore

IT IS OFTEN thought that the "sons of Zadok" referred to in Ezekiel's account of his vision of the future temple are the immortalised saints who minister in the temple.<sup>1</sup> However, this cannot be true. They must be mortal, for a number of reasons, including the following:

- they marry, with the same restrictions which applied to the Levitical priests of the tabernacle (Ezek. 44:22)
- they can be defiled (v. 25)
- they must make sin offerings for themselves (v. 27).

If in fact they are the immortalised saints then the question arises, Are they male or female? For Jesus says: "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Lk. 20:35,36); and the Apostle Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

## Limited role

The Levites, including both the ones who went astray and the sons of Zadok who loyally supported David, were limited in number, although there were always sufficient of them to ensure a round-the-clock manning of the tabernacle and then the temple. The Levites and priests were rostered into courses, and all of them had work to do during certain hours. In the millennial age the numbers of the mortal priests and Levites will also be limited, according to their families, and similar rostering will take place.

On the other hand, the saints are numbered in hundreds of thousands, probably millions, and include prophets, priests, kings, army generals, ordinary Israelites and those spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham who have been baptized into Christ and found worthy. Can it really be supposed that there is to be a roster of all these to attend the sacrificial altar for the period of a thousand years? If so, there would be a period of

365,000 days in which priests would be rostered in their courses, which would leave millions of immortal 'sons of Zadok' with no temple work to do for the whole millennium!

Apart from that, why should immortal beings need to attend sacrifices when they have already made a covenant with Yahweh by sacrifice and been accepted by Him to work in His service in His Kingdom?

The future temple is to be a Jewish sanctuary, and no uncircumcised Gentile, in heart or body, will be able to enter it (Ezek. 44:9). Mortal Gentiles of the Kingdom age who are prepared to "join themselves to the LORD" (Isa. 56:6) will be able to do so, but no others. These Gentiles may come from all nations, but all people from all nations will not be permitted within the sanctuary precincts.

## The prince's inheritance

Another question which has puzzled many is that of the identity of "the prince" who is referred to in Ezekiel 44:3 and onwards. Some say he is the Lord Jesus Christ, but the text indicates that he is mortal, like the sons of Zadok.

Ezekiel mentions the portions of the land for the priests and the Levites in 45:4,5:

"The holy portion of the land shall be for the priests the ministers of the sanctuary, which shall come near to minister unto the LORD: and it shall be a place for their houses, and an holy place for the sanctuary. And the five and twenty thousand of length, and the ten thousand of breadth, shall also the Levites, the ministers of the house, have for themselves, for a possession for twenty chambers". In verse 7 he refers to the land on each side of the sanctuary, which he says is for the prince:

"And a portion shall be for the prince on the one side and on the other side of the oblation of the holy portion, and of the possession of the city, before the oblation of the holy

1. See, for example, *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy* by Brother Henry Sulley.

portion, and before the possession of the city, from the west side westward, and from the east side eastward: and the length shall be over against one of the portions, from the west border unto the east border”.

As verses 4 and 5 refer to the sanctuary being for the priests and Levites, it seems natural that the portions on each side of the sanctuary should be for a mortal person of high priestly rank, and this would seem to be the meaning of the verse. There would be no point in donating a portion of land to the left and right of the sanctuary to the Lord Jesus Christ, because by this time he is the owner and ruler of the whole world.

Ezekiel 46:16-18 says:

“Thus saith the Lord GOD; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons’; it shall be their possession by inheritance. But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty; after it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall be his sons’ for them. Moreover the prince shall not take of the people’s inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that My people be not scattered every man from his possession”.

The Lord Jesus Christ does not have sons in the sense used here, for it clearly indicates that these sons are the fruit of a man’s loins, and not spiritual sons. The question of the jubilee year is also a matter for the law, and would not be applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is obvious that he would not be involved in defrauding any man of his birthright.

#### The high priest as a prince

The duties of the prince are outlined in Ezekiel 45:17-25 and are remarkably similar to the duties of the high priest of Israel. Note particularly verse 22: “And upon that day shall the prince prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bullock for a sin offering”. The Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for an offering once, and having done so does not have to do so again. Leviticus 9:7 shows clearly that under the Law of Moses the ordinance of Ezekiel 45:22 was carried out by Aaron, as high priest and ruler of the people, but under Moses, as the prince will be under Christ.

There is thus a strong Scriptural connection between the prince and the high priest. This is

supported by Acts 23:2-5:

“And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him [Paul] to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou *God’s high priest*? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of *the ruler of thy people*”.

Paul was quoting from Exodus 22:28: “Thou shalt not revile the gods [elohim, referring to the elders, or judges of Israel], nor curse the *ruler of thy people*”. The word for “ruler” here is *nasiy’* (*Strong’s* 5387). So Paul, in quoting from Exodus 22:28, was applying the word *nasiy’* to the high priest of Israel.

In the sequence of references to the prince starting in Ezekiel 44:3, the original is this same word *nasiy’* every time. There is no mention of a high priest in Ezekiel’s prophecy of the new temple, yet Israel under the Law had a high priest over all the priests and the Levites; he was their ruler. It would seem strange if Yahweh, in ordaining arrangements for the temple of the age to come, omitted such a person from the hierarchy. So we conclude that the ‘prince’ of Ezekiel 44 onwards is the high priest.

#### The different work of Christ and the prince

Now, of course, the great high priest after the order of Melchizedek is the Lord Jesus Christ. If he is not to be the high priest in the millennial temple, what work does he perform in his high priestly capacity? The answer is that he is of an entirely different order. He came from the tribe of Judah, “of which tribe”, Paul says in Hebrews 7:14, “Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood”.

Because the Law changed, in fact because it was fulfilled and passed away, the work of the Lord as the great high priest is also different, and is mainly concerned with the ecclesias of today. It is through him—and only through him—that we can all approach Yahweh, as he is the mediator between us and our God. His work as high priest to the faithful believers is largely over by the time he assumes the throne in Zion. His high priesthood takes on a different dimension then. He is the overseer of all the saints, who are themselves priests as well as rulers under his command. It would seem that his

connection with the temple is largely a ceremonial one, and he uses the otherwise closed east-gate to enter it on certain regal occasions.

Perhaps a comparison could be made between Jesus and Moses, who was a type of Jesus. The high priest was Aaron, but his overseer was Moses. Moses did not actually carry out the offering of sacrifices, but he supervised the work of Aaron and his sons while carrying out his own work of ruling and judging the people. Remember that Moses had a special relationship with the Deity. He did not eat or drink for forty days and nights while in Mount Sinai, and when he came down from the mount his face shone like the face of the Lord Jesus Christ after the transfiguration.

A similar situation will surely apply in the millennial age. The Lord Jesus Christ sits in Jerusalem as the supreme ruler and judge of the world, while the mortal high priest, the prince, carries out or supervises the temple sacrifices. It is obvious that this work would occupy a huge

amount of time, and the Lord could not be expected to spend almost all his daily work time as the King of kings in cutting up carcasses and preparing them for sacrifice on an altar.

The nations of the world will come to Jerusalem to hear the word of Yahweh emanating from the great King who reigns from the throne of David in Mount Zion. But they will not be permitted in the temple precincts. The Law was a schoolmaster, as Paul says, to bring the people to an understanding of Christ. The sacrifices in the millennial age are a memorial of that Law and its fulfilment; they are for Israel after the flesh in the latter day, and for those Gentiles who align themselves with Israel.

The prince, then, would seem to be the latter-day equivalent of the Aaronic high priest, appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ from among the sons of Zadok (who was a descendant of Eleazar, son of Aaron) to be chief over them and to carry out the work once assigned to Aaron and the subsequent high priests of Israel.

## Solomon's peaceful reign and the removal of the Amalekites\*

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**I**N MY TWO-PART article about the Amalekites I put the case for the Amalekites being the Hyksos who ruled Egypt for a time.<sup>1</sup> As such they would have been dominant in the Middle East for three to four centuries. During this time of Amalekite supremacy the Israelites seem to have been the only people in the region who incessantly struggled for their independence. By their resistance they frustrated Amalek's ambitions to dominate the Levant, which may have facilitated the eventual downfall of their régime in Egypt.

Not long after, King Saul's military campaigns completed the collapse of their empire throughout the region, and removed any threat of immediate recovery. No wonder, then, that relations were so good between Solomon and Pharaoh. The Egyptians must have been very positive toward Israel for a generation or two, although they quickly took advantage of the political turmoil after Solomon's death. Just five years into the reign of Rehoboam, Shishak invaded Jerusa-

lem and plundered the king's house and the temple (1 Kgs. 14:25,26).

After the Exodus the Egyptians do not appear again in the Scriptures until the reign of King Solomon. Pharaoh made a marriage alliance with Solomon (3:1) and sold horses and chariots to Israel (10:28,29). Under a revised chronology, remains at the Timna copper mines, a few miles north of Eilat, show that Solomon and Pharaoh shared resources and technology. These are all indicators of a convalescent Egyptian economy, in which the pharaohs deemed it best to cooperate with stronger local powers and increase trade. Their first priority was to restore Egypt's fortunes after centuries of pillaging, so that the once-mighty empire could recover from oblivion. All this supports the idea that the Egyptian war of

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\* All quotations from the RSV.

1. "The Amalekites", Nov. 2003, p. 423; Dec. 2003, p. 459.