

THE HOUSE OF ZADOK – CALLING OF A NEW PRIESTHOOD

DENISE WOODS

“But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood,” says the Lord God. ... And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My sabbaths.” (Ezekiel 44:15 & 23, 24).

Before Israel was exiled to Babylon, God gave Ezekiel a vision of the restored temple. The building is described in meticulous detail, as are its furnishings, the ministry activities and responsibilities of the priests and Levites. Uniquely in this new dispensation the Lord instructed that the Sons of Zadok were to be separated from the other Levites to serve before His throne. They alone had the privilege of ministering to Him. The other Levites ministered to the people and took care of the administration of the temple. God made a distinction within the priesthood between those who appeared before Him, and those who did not.

Why was this distinction made, and what was it that qualified the Sons of Zadok for this awesome privilege? Given this understanding, what does it mean for us as New Testament believers in the 21st Century? To answer these questions it is necessary to look at the life of Zadok and how he and his fathers responded to the call of God on their lives.

When God instituted the priesthood He made it clear that He called and anointed the priests, and that this was confined to inheritance by family lineage. No one was allowed to take this responsibility upon themselves. To this end Aaron and his sons were separated from the tribe of Levi to serve as priests before the Lord in the tabernacle (Exodus 28:1-3; 29:43-46). Of the four sons of Aaron, only Eleazar and Ithamar lived to fulfill their calling. Abihu and Nadab offered strange fire before the Lord, and God killed them on account of their presumption (Lev 10:1-2; Numbers 16). Even so, only the descendants of Eleazar were faithful to the end. Several priests of this line are mentioned in Scripture as examples of uncompromising righteousness. The most reknown of these were Phinehas, Zadok and Ezra.

PHINEHAS – “MOUTH OF BRASS”

The name Phinehas means “mouth of brass”. In a time of national apostasy Phinehas intervened on behalf of the nation and turned the anger of God away from Israel (Num 25). During their sojourn in the wilderness Israel was seduced by Moab, and “joined themselves to Baal Peor”. To counter the plague of God’s judgment that followed Phinehas, Aaron’s grandson killed a man of Israel and a Moabite woman on account of their fornication and idolatry. God commended his conduct and rewarded him with a “covenant of peace; to him and his descendants after him; a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.” David records this incident in Psalm 106:30-31 saying, his action “was accounted to him for righteousness”.

This radical standard is endorsed time and again in Scripture. Consider that this priest, so angered by the idolatry of the nation, kills a man and it is accounted to him as righteous conduct, such that he is rewarded with “an everlasting covenant of peace.” **Passion and zeal**

for the Lord and His cause in Israel is what commends Phinehas as an example of righteous priestly conduct.

Some generations later Phinehas is mentioned among the forebears of Zadok whose integrity and faithfulness during the reign of David earns him a similar tribute. (See 1 Chron 6:49-53.)

ZADOK – THE “RIGHTEOUS” ONE

The name Zadok means “righteous”. Zadok joined the army of David as a valiant, young warrior. He is listed among the divisions that were equipped for war and that came to Hebron to turn over the kingdom of Saul to David according to the word of the Lord (1Chron 12:23-28). Scripture records that by warfare David subdued the land before he became king over Israel. He then established his capital in Jerusalem and, after his first attempt to bring the ark of the Lord to Israel had failed, he commissioned the priests to bring it to the place that he had prepared for it in Jerusalem. Zadok and Abiathar, the direct descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar the sons of Aaron, were given this task.

Thereafter Zadok served in David’s administration; and his is the continuing line of priests throughout the remainder of the Old Testament (2 Sam 8:17). So faithful was he to David that he accompanied him with the ark when David fled from Jerusalem during the rebellion of Absalom. He later returned to Jerusalem at David’s command as a spy before the rebellion was quelled and David was reinstated as king. At the end of David’s life when Adonijah conspired with Abiathar to seize the throne from Solomon, Zadok was not party to the conspiracy but remained faithful to David and the counsel of God for Israel. It was Zadok and Nathan the prophet that anointed Solomon, thus taking forward the agenda of God for Israel under the leadership of Solomon (1 Kings 1:8-53). Zadok’s loyalty was not forgotten even after David’s death. Solomon made him the high priest and exiled Abiathar who had shared this position with Zadok until the time that he conspired with Adonijah to usurp the throne (1 Kings 2:26-35).

The outstanding characteristic of Zadok’s life was that he discerned where God was taking Israel in his generation and defended God’s purposes with his whole life.

In the first instance he recognized that the kingdom was to be transferred from the house of Saul to David. He understood that the purposes of God for the nation would not prosper under Saul’s leadership and that the anointing to take the nation forward had been given to David. Secondly, when David’s leadership was threatened by the rebellion of Absalom, Zadok again discerned what God was doing and remained faithful to David and the purposes of God. Yet again, when a dispute raged over God’s choice of leadership and Abiathar compromised his priestly calling to conspire with Adonijah against God’s counsel, Zadok discerned the will of God, and remained faithful to uphold the purposes of God for His people. The disastrous consequences of failure to watch over the purposes of God in this instance would have given the Powers of Darkness the advantage of delaying, if not derailing, the plan of God to establish the kingdom as a model nation under Solomon’s rule; God’s intention being to demonstrate His Wisdom, power and goodness to all nations. This is made clear in the account of the Queen of Sheba who traveled from afar to see for herself what God had done for Israel (2 Chronicles 9:1-12).

THE SONS OF ZADOK

When the sons of Zadok are mentioned in Ezekiel 44, it is in the context of the large-scale apostasy of the nation that characterized the period of Israel's history when the kingdom was divided. This rebellion was started by King Jeroboam I of Israel and later spread to corrupt the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12, 13 and 2 Kings 23:8). Only after the Babylonian exile and the return of Ezra and Nehemiah was there any hope of restoration. Ezra the scribe, a descendant of Zadok and Phinehas, was the priest in this dispensation and instructed the nation in the counsel of God, thereby directing the reforms that were essential to prepare the temple and the city for the coming Messiah (Ez 7:1-5)..

Three things were to characterize the ministry of the Sons of Zadok. Firstly: They were to be teachers. Specifically they were to instruct Israel in the difference between the holy and the unholy; and cause them to discern between the clean and the unclean. Secondly, in controversial matters they were to stand as judges, judging according to God's judgments. And thirdly, they were to adhere to the laws and statutes of the Lord and honor His Sabbaths.

RELEVANT IN OUR DAY

Paul makes it clear that God's dealings with Israel are to instruct us in truth and righteousness so that we can "run our race" diligently to the end. Therefore the standard of the life and ministry of these men should challenge us to be relevant in our generation.

We need to appreciate that the pursuit of revival and reformation cannot be realized apart from a radical commitment to our calling as priests before the Lord. If the will and counsel of God is to be done in our day, it requires men and women in the mould of Zadok, Phinehas and Ezra to rise up and impact our generation.

Like Zadok we need to discern what God is doing our nation. A clear understanding of the counsel of the Lord for our time is essential. Having discerned this we must be joined to the "company of David"; that is, we must recognize where God has placed His anointing and pledge our undivided loyalty to the purposes of the Kingdom. This precedes the mandate to subdue the land and bring it under the Lordship of Jesus by intercession and warfare prayer. And finally, only once the spiritual climate of the nation has been changed is it possible to bring the presence of God to bear upon the land. This in turn opens the way for the Kingdom of God to manifest as the testimony of God's wisdom and goodness to the nations.

The key to God's will being done on earth is a **righteous priesthood**. A radical, uncompromising, committed generation of priests must rise up in our day if we are to witness the goodness of God before the return of the Lord Jesus. The model for this is the life and ministry of Zadok who served as a priest in David's generation.