

## Were David's Sons Really Priests?

CARL EDWIN ARMERDING

In the *New American Standard Bible's* translation of 2 Sam 8:18b, a classic problem of OT studies is skirted by the substitution of the phrase "chief ministers" for the Hebrew text, which plainly says that David's sons were "priests" (*koh<sup>a</sup>nîm*). A marginal note does give the literal rendering, but it is obvious that the plain meaning was an embarrassment to the committee. Inasmuch as it is characteristic of the life and work of Professor Tenney that problems should be faced rather than avoided, I have chosen, in his honor, to attempt in this short study an exoneration of the unambiguous text of 2 Sam 8:18. In so doing, I hope to show that there is in the reference another link in a strong chain that ultimately supports the essential theological truth of the royal priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, the translators of the *NASB* are not the first to have found a solution other than taking the clear meaning of the word. The translators of the *King James (Authorized) Version* many years ago preferred "chief rulers" to "priests." The Chronicler, writing about six hundred years after David's time, states only that David's sons were "the chiefs beside the king" (*hāri'šōnîm le'yad hammelek*, 1 Chr 18:17), and it is undoubtedly from this reference that both the *KJV* and the *NASB* made their harmonization. Likewise, the *LXX* text of 2 Sam 8:18 avoids the problem, using *aularchai* instead of *hiereis* for the word *koh<sup>a</sup>nîm* (or some other word, which may have been in the *Vorlage*). But the problem will not go away so easily. In a second list of David's court officials (2 Sam 20:23-26) there is, in addition to the official Levitical priesthood, a reference to Ira the Jairite as the priest *le'dāwîd*. Finally, in a Solomonic list in 1 Kgs 4:1-5 there are again two official Levitical priests, plus the statement *w<sup>e</sup>zābûd ben-nātān kōhēn rē'eh hammelek*. The *RSV*, following the more usual interpretation, translates this as "Zabud the son of Nathan was priest and king's friend," making Zabud the holder of the dual office. Zabud apparently succeeded Ira the Jairite as priest. The *KJV* retains the grammatical structure of the *RSV* but

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Carl Edwin Armerding, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. B.A., Gordon College; B.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; graduate study at Wheaton College Graduate School; M.A. and Ph.D., Brandeis University.

translates *kōhēn* as "principal officer," in keeping with the avoidance of the priestly terminology in 2 Sam 8:18. The *NASB* here finds another way out of the difficulty. The text is clearly problematical, so the *NASB*, while retaining the translation "priest" for *kōhēn*, says, "Zabud the son of Nathan, a priest, (was) the king's friend"<sup>1</sup> Here are three references, two of them fairly unambiguous, that point to a second order of priests within the court of early Israel. In the first case, those so designated are definitely non-Levitical (David's sons), while in the case of Ira the Jairite and Zabud ben Nathan, there is nothing to indicate Levitical background.

Classical solutions to the problem (in addition to altering the translation) are not wanting. These are listed by Aelred Cody in his very useful monograph.<sup>2</sup> Cody rightly comments, however, "These hypotheses have nothing to support them and they attempt to solve a problem that lies not in the text but in an assumption *a priori* that David's sons, Nathan's son, Zabud, and Ira the Jairite could not have been priests as the text says they were." The fact is, the texts do say they were priests and no amount of explaining away will rid us of that fact.

I am going to assume that both text and normal translation for each passage are correct, since all signs point in this direction. There were then priests in early Israel who were (1) connected with the royal house, (2) not of the Levitical order, and (3) serving a function that is still largely unknown to us. Rather than try to speculate on the function of these priests, I want to re-examine the concept of a non-Levitical, royally connected priesthood in early Israel, and then draw out the theological implications of what is found.

First, it is clear that there is a strong tradition of a royal priesthood within the OT itself. Most important, of course, is the Melchizedek reference in Gen 14:17-24 with its application to a Davidic king (or ultimately to the Messiah) in the enthronement Ps 110.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes it does not matter whether the tradition was originally connected with Shechem, Shiloh or Jerusalem, though it is apparent that later biblical and post-biblical writers, especially Josephus, identified Salem with Jerusalem. The idea of a king who was also specifically designated a priest is clear, and it is this factor that looms so large in the discussion of Ps 110. In normal Canaanite fashion, he was designated a priest *l<sup>e</sup>* ("with respect to") a deity, in this case El Elyon, who is identified (in Gen 14:22) with Yahweh. Cody makes the point that normally the Israelite *kōhēn* was priest with respect to (*l<sup>e</sup>*) some human authority (e.g. Micah, Judg 17:5, 10, 12; 18:4, 19; or the Danites, Judg 18:19, 30; or David, 2 Sam 20:26)<sup>4</sup> but here there is a direct

<sup>1</sup>Cf. R. deVaux, "Melange," *RB*, 48 (1939), 403, n. 3, for discussion of the textual problem here.

<sup>2</sup>A. Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, Rome, 1969, p. 103, n. 55.

<sup>3</sup>That these two passages are very early and reflect a Canaanite background is now generally though not universally held. A survey of the material is available in I. Hunt, "Recent Melchizedek Study," *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. by J. L. MacKenzie, New York, 1962, pp. 21-33. A more recent discussion is by J. A. Emerton, "The Riddle of Genesis XIV," *VT*, 21 (Oct. 1971), 403-39.

<sup>4</sup>Cody, *History*, p. 101. I see no reason to deny the authenticity of the references in 1 Sam 1:3 and 1 Kgs 2:27 where Hophni and Phinehas and then



relationship between the king-priest and his God. He himself is both the vice-regent under God, and the mediator between his people and God.

Here the pattern is set. The royal priest, unlike the other priests mentioned, served directly under God, a fact that is corroborated in Ps 110:1, where the one to whom the psalm is addressed is seated at the right hand of Yahweh. Additional functions performed which fit into a priestly role are the blessing of Abraham *and* God (Melchizedek is the mediator, who can turn both ways), and the receiving of tithes.<sup>5</sup> The context in which the "tenth" is given (whether given *to* or *by* Melchizedek) is clearly connected with Melchizedek's role as priest of El Elyon, and is not simply tribute money to a local king. Abram's relations with Canaanites, both his allies (*ba'alê berît*, Gen 14:13) and the local kings (Gen 14:21-24), are carried out quite differently from his encounter with Melchizedek, and it is plain that the difference lay in Melchizedek's role as a priest of El Elyon. In fact, the distinction drawn between Melchizedek and the king of Sodom should give us caution, lest any sweeping generalizations about the nature of Canaanite royal priesthood be made from the role of Melchizedek. Even if we are to date Abraham in the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (rather than Late Bronze, as several scholars do who write on this subject) and thus take our model of Canaanite kingship from sources reflecting that period, we still have to recognize that there were many petty kings in the land. But Abram neither gives tithes to nor accepts blessing from all. Melchizedek stands as a lone example of a royal figure whose priesthood is recognized by the biblical writer as a genuine position of mediatorship before a true God.

There is no hint in the biblical record that the patriarchs ever thought of themselves as kings, either in the Canaanite "petty-king" sense or in the sense of later empire-builders like David and Solomon. Gen 36 does refer to kings (*m<sup>e</sup>lākīm*) of Edom, but the part of the chapter that undoubtedly reflects the earliest designation of Edomite patriarchal figures (Gen 36:10-30, 40-43) uses the term *'allûp* rather than *melek* for the clan head. However, it is clear that Israelite patriarchal clan heads Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also functioned as the family priest. Each one built altars, sacrificed, offered prayers directly to God, and received revelations and thus teaching directly from the Lord. But since there is no hint of royalty in the record, their priestly activities are not relevant to this discussion.

With the rise of Moses we come to a time when a royal function is clearly attached to the leader of Israel, though again no royal title is ever given. But Moses is pictured in the Exodus narratives as much more than a

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Abiathar are called "priests to Yahweh," but Cody's point is not materially affected by these exceptions to the rule. The case of others designated Levitical priests is ambiguous because in no clear case is the Levitical priest called a priest "with respect to" (*l<sup>e</sup>*) anyone.

<sup>5</sup>The recent attempt by R. H. Smith, "Abraham and Melchizedek," *ZAW*, 77 (1965), 129-53, to find in the passage a suzerainty treaty in which Melchizedek gives tribute money to Abraham in a fashion analogous to the action of King PBL with the victorious KRT, I find unconvincing. Unless Gen 14:21-23 is to be separated from the rest of the section, it is clear that Abram would *not* be made rich by acquisition from Canaanite, or even Mesopotamian, kings.

clan leader; he assumes all the prerogatives of a monarch.<sup>6</sup> Thus, his relation to the priesthood, and his function as such, becomes of interest, even if only to support or deny conclusions from other data. Cody discusses both the passage in the Book of the Covenant (Exod 24:3-8) and the narrative in Exod 18 in which Moses is somehow involved (the text is not clear) in a sacrificial meal and receives oracles from God.<sup>7</sup> In the former passage, Moses built an altar and manipulated the blood, but as Cody points out, the ritual is quite different from that prescribed for Levitical offerings. Cody argues that the text has to do with covenant-making rather than sacrifice and concludes that Moses is less a priest than a leader. He finally affirms that "whether we call his activity priestly or not depends on what we understand by 'priestly.'" <sup>8</sup>

Of course, Moses is presented in the early chapters of Exod as functioning prior to the designation of a special Levitical priesthood, and as such he partakes of the character of priest for his people, in addition to his kingly and prophetic roles. When Aaron is initially introduced (Exod 4:14) he is called "Aaron the Levite," a text that might lead us to expect priestly functions on his part. However, Aaron, throughout the remainder of the time in Egypt, is simply Moses' spokesman or prophet (Exod 7:1) and never performs as a priest. It is the elders of Israel (Exod 12:21) who perform the Passover sacrifice, and thus the first-born are set apart to God, seemingly for some priestly purpose, in the narrative of Exod 12. Exod 19:6 pictures the entire nation as ideally a "kingdom of priests" (*mamleket kōh<sup>a</sup>nîm*), although in the same chapter (Exod 19:22 and 24) priests and people are separately designated, and neither has anything like direct access to God.

Coming back to Exod 24:5 we find "young men of the sons of Israel" offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, as part of Moses' covenant ceremony, and in the latter part of the chapter (Exod 24:9-11) Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, together with seventy elders of Israel, are granted a special vision of God. Finally, in Exod 28, Aaron and his sons are set apart to serve as priests, though in light of the special ordination of the Levites in Exod 32 most critics have concluded that the instructions of Exod 28 must be from a later period.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, the role of Moses vis-à-vis the Levitical order is not our concern. What should be noted is that, both before and after Sinai, Moses the leader performed priestly acts, particularly in the sense that he, more than any other, had direct access to God and was the direct representative of God among the people. In this sense his role is analogous to that of the royal priest, though to say that he was such would be stretching the analogy.

<sup>6</sup>E.g. legislator and executor of a developed legal system, commander-in-chief of a standing army, chief architect of foreign policy, recipient of taxes and tithes, etc.

<sup>7</sup>Cody, *History*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup>It should be noted that nowhere in Exod 28 is there a proscription of non-Levitical or non-Aaronic priestly activity. Exod 25-31 concerns the worship at the sanctuary in Israel, and in this there seems to be no provision for non-Levitical participation. Relegation of the entire section to a putative "P" document need not be resorted to in order to explain non-Levitical priestly acts *outside of* the sanctuary.



Joshua, though presented as an absolute ruler like Moses, seems much more dependent upon the Levitical orders. His covenant-making function (Exod 24:13) and his direct access to God could be called priestly activities, but there the similarities end. When we come to the book of Judges, the situation is very different. The silence of Judges concerning legitimate priesthood (apart from Judg 20:27-28) has long intrigued scholars and various solutions to the critical problems have been proposed.<sup>10</sup> Judg, however, is not generally a good source for studying the royal element in priestly function, because there is little evidence of any truly royal figure within that book. Gideon, like Moses before him, built an altar and offered sacrifices (6:24-26), but this was before he was even a judge, and furthermore it fits the normal pattern of family sacrifices of the early period. Gideon, like the editor of Judg, has a clear antipathy toward the whole idea of kingship (Judg 8:22-23), and the pathetic account of the Shechemite reign of Gideon's son Abimelech only fortifies the impression. Similar to Gideon's is the sacrifice made by Samson's father, Manoah (Judg 13), while the strange story of the Levite who signed on as Micah's priest (in place of, and obviously preferred to, Micah's son) raises more questions than it answers. The major point of interest here, in light of our initial reference in 2 Sam 8:18, is the fact that Micah, like David later, had his son as priest. Had Micah himself served in this way, it would be simply another example of patriarchal priesthood, but the installation of the son as *kōhēn* lends another dimension. However, the entire incident is considered most abnormal (Judg 17:6). If Micah's son had continued to function after the arrival of the Levite, and if Micah had made any pretension of kingship, the accounts would be more analogous, but Micah clearly preferred a Levite to his son, and the text explicitly states that kingship had not yet arrived in the land (Judg 17:6). Finally, the account in Judg 20 and 21 tells us nothing about unusual priestly functions and even less about kingship.

The next great judicial figure is Samuel, and here we come to the transition between a local judge and a genuine king, though certainly Samuel partakes much more of the character of the former.<sup>11</sup> Although it was he who united Israel, and it was he who apparently attempted to establish some hereditary succession (1 Sam 8:1-3), he never claimed the title of king and obviously found the concept distasteful. But that Samuel functioned as a priest is without question. Although his lineage is given in 1 Sam 1:1 as from Ephraim, the Chronicler (1 Chr 6:27 and 33-34) ties him to the Levitical tribe. His early training is as an assistant to Eli in the Shiloh shrine, and 1 Sam 2:27-36 seems to see in him the legitimate successor to the fallen line of Eli. Whether in fact Samuel is intended to be the "faithful priest" of 1 Sam 2:35, and, if so, who the "anointed" of God might be, is not entirely clear. Christians have always seen in the prophecy a pointer to relationships between king and priest in the development of a messianic consciousness.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Edward Robertson, *The Period of the Judges*, Manchester, 1946, pp. 22-24.

<sup>11</sup>Like Moses, he controls legal, political and military institutions for an increasingly centralized state, but the centralization and bureaucracy did not reach the levels of the earlier or later times.

But that Samuel functioned as a priest (in addition to his functions as prophet and king-figure) is clear. To exactly which role each of his acts should be assigned is not so obvious, as there is much role-overlap at this time, but we should note the following: Samuel received oracles (1 Sam 3:21—this was a priestly function; cf. 1 Sam 22:10; 23:6-12). He interceded in prayer for Israel, offered burnt and other offerings to Yahweh (1 Sam 7:8-9), and even after a king had been appointed he reserved for himself certain sacrificial functions (1 Sam 13). Finally, he appeared in the sanctuary service wearing a linen ephod (1 Sam 2:18). 1 Sam 22:18 would seem to indicate that wearing a linen ephod was synonymous with being a priest, but Cody questions the legitimacy of this text as it is traditionally understood.<sup>12</sup> This would leave only 2 Sam 6:14 where David wore an ephod for his dance before Yahweh, and since the question is one of proving a priestly act by the actor's wearing an ephod we cannot use this as evidence. However, in light of the Massoretic Text of 1 Sam 22:18 and the general context of Samuel's position, both while in training under Eli and in subsequent days, I would suggest that the evidence points overwhelmingly to his having functioned as a priest. When Cody claims that "he was not, in fact, a priest in any genuine sense,"<sup>13</sup> I would question his conclusions. It is precisely the fact of a priesthood operating outside of the normal sanctuary that I wish to establish, and its tie with royalty and the royal order is the key point at issue. Of course, the Chronicler does testify to Samuel's Levitical heritage, and Ps 99:6 groups him with the priests, Moses and Aaron, but this is not crucial for our study. What is important is that, in Samuel, we have another prototype of the royal-priestly figure, though his priesthood is presented as closer to the Levitical than the Melchizedek model. In fact, it is Samuel who dominates the priestly role in his own time, even though there is at least a functioning remnant of an old Levitical order. That old order, weakened through the almost simultaneous death of Eli and his two sons, resurfaced in the person of Ahijah (1 Sam 14:3), apparently a grandson of Eli, who is found as a retainer in Saul's rustic court at Gibeah. Later (apparently after the destruction of Shiloh) members of the same family are found in the sanctuary at Nob near Jerusalem (1 Sam 21-23), and the tragic story of their destruction by Saul and the transfer of the line's allegiance to David is well known. Therefore, although there was never lacking some kind of continuity in the Levitical priesthood (activities of the alternate line of Zadokites descended from Eleazar and Phinehas are not even considered in our texts), it is not until David finally raises Zadok and Abimelech to the level of court priests that the Levitical order again predominates in the religious life of Israel. In all this period it is the civil or royal head who acts as priest.

Saul presents an exception to the civil head functioning as priest, and it is tempting to say that the only reason his priestly pretenses are rejected

<sup>12</sup> Cody, *History*, p. 75, where it is suggested that since the word linen is absent in the B text of the LXX, and since the verb *nasa'* is never really attested in Hebrew with the sense of "wearing," we should properly translate the verse, "carrying the (oracular) ephod." Cody does not cite 1 Sam 14:3, but this might be an example of *nasa'* with ephod in the sense of "wear."

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.



is that the editors of Samuel regard everything Saul does as irregular. Such a claim would leave the biblical editors open to the charge of gross inconsistency, however, and we should expect them to have harmonized the negative attitude toward Saul's attempt at sacrifice with their apparent approval of the same activity on the part of David and Solomon. Samuel's priestly activity is not as much of an issue as Saul's, for Samuel was a legitimate Levitical figure. Nevertheless, there is no hint that David's or Solomon's sacrifices or other priestly acts were not perfectly in order. During Saul's tenure, the Levitical priests, represented by Ahijah ben Ahitub, a descendant of Eli, are represented in the court at Gibeah (1 Sam 14:3). In the same chapter we find Saul using Ahijah as an oracular functionary in connection with the ark,<sup>14</sup> though later Saul builds an altar himself with no mention of priestly help (1 Sam 14:35). Again in the same chapter a priest appears (1 Sam 14:36), and again it is in his role as chief oracle, though this time it is Urim and Thummim that are used (1 Sam 14:41). Finally, the Levitical priesthood is represented in 1 Sam 21-23, this time in the shrine at Nob (not far from Gibeah) and in the person of Ahimelech, another son of Ahitub (1 Sam 22:20). Here is a shrine complete with holy bread (the Bread of the Presence, 1 Sam 21:4), an ephod (1 Sam 23:9) and the sword of Goliath (1 Sam 21:9; cf. 1 Sam 17:54). Neither Saul nor David, however, asks the priests to conduct sacrifices (though presumably they did), and again the major interest seems to be in the oracular use of the ephod.

During this entire period there are but two references to sacrifice. One, recorded in 1 Sam 20:29, indicates with apparent approval that David's family would conduct a clan sacrifice in Bethlehem, and it would not seem unusual if Saul's clan had conducted the same kind of sacrifices at Gibeah in connection with their new moon feast. The other reference is to Saul's condemned act at Gilgal (1 Sam 13:8-15), where that monarch, facing the exigencies of an impending battle, took it upon himself to offer the burnt offering and presumably, had time permitted, the peace offering. Since both David and Solomon offered burnt offerings, and of course Samuel was authorized to do the same, we are forced to certain conclusions. There seems to have been no prohibition of family sacrifices (either in the period of the Judges or in Saul's time), but here either the occasion (beginning of a battle) or the shrine (Gilgal) or Saul's lack of credentials (perhaps he was not ordained for that priestly role) demands that Saul refrain from the priestly act.

David, like Saul, used the remnants of the priesthood at Nob to inquire of Yahweh (2 Sam 23:6; 30:7 and possibly 2 Sam 2:1 and 5:19, 23). However, when the ark is brought up to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6) there is no reference to any special priesthood. The Chronicler makes it clear that the reason for the abortive first attempt—the ark being brought then only as far as the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite—was that there were no Levites in charge (1 Chr 15:2). Certainly David supervised the movement of the ark both times, and the journey was accomplished amidst singing,

<sup>14</sup> According to 1 Sam 7:2 the ark was then at Kiriath-jearim; possibly the LXX reading "ephod" should be substituted in 1 Sam 14:18, as the *Jerusalem Bible* does.

sacrificing and dancing (2 Sam 6:12-15), in all of which David (clothed in a linen ephod) takes his place as the religious leader of the people. In the tent pitched for the ark, David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings (2 Sam 6:17) and dispensed the blessing of Yahweh, together with (ritual?) portions of bread and raisins (2 Sam 6:19). It is interesting to note that the Chronicler, with his concern to give the Levites their due, supplements but does not contradict this picture. Although Levites enter the picture as porters of the ark (1 Chr 15:2), and perform sacrifices (1 Chr 15:26; 16:1), it is still David who is dressed in the ephod (1 Chr 15:27), blessing the people and distributing the portion (1 Chr 16:2) and even offering the burnt offerings and peace offerings (1 Chr 16:2).<sup>15</sup> The role of Zadok and Abiathar is supervisory, but only in a secondary sense (1 Chr 15:11), and after the ceremonies Zadok is sent back to the high place at Gibeon where, according to the Chronicler, were the tabernacle,<sup>16</sup> the altar of burnt offering, and much of the Levitical machinery (1 Chr 16:39-42).<sup>17</sup>

Zadok and Abiathar appear together, but with Zadok apparently taking the lead, in carrying the ark out of Jerusalem when David escaped before Absalom (2 Sam. 15:24-29). Both are also counted in David's two lists of officials (2 Sam 8:17 and 20:25), but neither is named as having participated in David's final sacrifice at the threshing floor of Araunah, whether in the 2 Sam 24:25 account or in its parallel in 1 Chr 21:26-28.

In summary, it seems plain that David himself was the chief sacrificial and priestly intermediary between Yahweh and the people during his reign. The Levitical priests were used for determining the will of God, and apparently kept equipment for that purpose, such as an ephod and the Urim and Thummim. The Zadokites seem to have been centered at the

<sup>15</sup>Some may feel I have built a case for royal priesthood based on texts that speak of David or Solomon offering sacrifice while, in truth, neither of them actually sacrificed. Levites were always there, but they are just not mentioned. It is as though the reporter states in the evening news, "The President today has called up an additional fifty thousand soldiers." Any listener knows that the President does such a thing only through his agents; so with the sacrifices of David and Solomon it is not necessary to mention the Levitical functionary, but in light of material in the Mosaic law it is obvious that the Levites would have done the actual sacrificing. I can only say that, from my knowledge of the texts, there is too much that points to personal sacrificial acts on the part of kings. Furthermore, sacrifice is only one of the priestly activities of David and Solomon, and it is consistent with the other activities they perform.

<sup>16</sup>It is true, as the marginal note in *NASB* suggests, that the word *miškan* can mean simply "dwelling place." However, its use in cultic terminology as a technical term for the tent-dwelling of Yahweh is well established and there is no reason to doubt such a use here. If there were any doubt, the reference in 1 Chr 21:29 should remove it. The problem arises because there is no other unambiguous reference to the tabernacle after the destruction of Shiloh. Many scholars of an earlier day surmised that the tabernacle in the wilderness was a literary reconstruction, based on Solomon's temple and, secondarily, on David's tent in Jerusalem, but on this question there is no unanimity currently.

<sup>17</sup>There is no information about the whereabouts of Abiathar and the former priests of Nob. It may be that they attended the ark in its new tent in Jerusalem. The reference to the high place in Gibeon, with its tabernacle, has long intrigued scholars but little is known about it, except the Chronicles reference and the fact that Solomon prayed there—1 Kgs 3:4.



shrine in Gibeon with its tabernacle, while the Abiathar line may originally have served David more directly in Jerusalem, possibly having been eventually attached to his new shrine after being detached from Nob. But David himself is the chief priest of the Jerusalem tent, a role that seems to have created no conflicts with his royal and non-Levitical status.

This brings us to the matter of David's two lists of officials. In the first one (2 Sam 8:18) David's two sons are listed as priests, along with Zadok and Abiathar, while in the second list (2 Sam 20:26) Ira the Jairite is listed, again with Zadok and Abiathar, as David's priest. Since there is no indication that either David's sons or Ira were Levites, I can only surmise that they were part of another order, perhaps partaking of the royal order connected with the Jerusalem shrine, which David himself served as monarch under Yahweh in his country. This could be argued more conclusively with the sons of David, because of the nature of the relationship, but it may have been true of Ira as well.

At the close of David's life we see the same sacrificial role being undertaken by his son Adonijah (1 Kgs 1:9, 18), the latter activity with the assistance of Abiathar. The sacrificial act of Adonijah, moreover, is most significant, as it was conducted before all of the important men of Israel by the Serpent's Stone by the spring Rogel (En-Rogel, 1 Kgs 1:9). It seems highly suggestive of the fact that Adonijah was proclaiming himself the new "priest-king" in place of his father, or at least it was interpreted as such by Bathsheba, Nathan, and eventually David. Later the same day Solomon is anointed at another spring, this time by the priest Zadok (1 Kgs 1:38-40), but there is no mention of sacrifice in the hastily prepared ceremony. It is only from Solomon's later activities that we may conclude that he too considered himself the chief intermediary between his people and Yahweh.

Solomon's priestly activities parallel those of his father David. He prays at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:15), after which a major effort is given to the construction of the temple and the setting in motion of its ritual. In the actual dedication of the temple the priests are involved (1 Kgs 8:3-4), but it is Solomon himself who leads the procession, sacrificing (1 Kgs 8:5, 62-64), blessing the assembly (1 Kgs 8:12-21, 55-61), interceding before God (1 Kgs 8:22-53), and making covenant with Yahweh (1 Kgs 9).<sup>18</sup>

In a summary of his activities, the author of Kings (1 Kgs 9:25) notes that Solomon would offer burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar three times a year. The following chapter (1 Kgs 10:5) cites the number and splendor of Solomon's burnt offerings as part of that which amazed the Queen of Sheba.

Finally, Solomon, like David, had a list of court officials.<sup>19</sup> Together with the usual reference to Zadok and Abiathar (though the latter is ultimately deposed), there is reference, mentioned above, to one Zabud ben

<sup>18</sup> These chapters, 1 Kgs 8-9, are generally considered post-exilic by literary critics, so it is especially interesting to note that they in no way deny Solomon's central role in the priestly activity. The post-exilic book of Chronicles, which likewise gives the king the most prominent priestly role, is here simply a touched-up version of the Kings account.

<sup>19</sup> A definitive study of this material is now available in T. N. D. Mettinger, *Solomonic State Officials*, Lund, 1971.

Nathan, who was the King's Friend. The textual problem has already been discussed, but either Zabud or his father Nathan is called a priest (*kōhēn*), and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that we have here the same order of priesthood noted earlier in David's time. If the father of Zabud is the same Nathan the prophet who was David's adviser (1 Kgs 1:10, etc.) there is no indication that he had a Levitical background. Again, it is difficult to know whether such men as Ira and Zabud had any connection with the royal priesthood, but obviously both served in a special way in the Jerusalem court.

Throughout the time of the monarchy various examples of royal-priestly activities could be given, but the examples noted should be sufficient. They hold special significance in light of Ps 110, an enthronement hymn, which ties together the old Canaanite Melchizedek royal priesthood with the Judean monarchy of David, Solomon and their successors. Although some evangelical Christians through the years have shown a notable reticence to apply Messianic Psalm terminology to OT individuals,<sup>20</sup> it seems obvious to me that there was a strong sense of royal-priestly ideology that existed in early Israel, and a psalm like Ps 110 simply shows us the chain of thinking by which this ideology was expressed. Melchizedek provides the prototype, and it is after his "order" (*'al dibrātî*) that David and Solomon are to be thought of as priests. This order is different from the Aaronic one, and it would require a full exegesis of the Ps to elucidate the matter.<sup>21</sup> The royal priest is not such by human investiture, and his commission is irrevocable. He sits (figuratively) at God's right hand, unlike Levitical priests who are not so directly in God's presence, and he rules in the midst of all his foes. His scepter, coming forth from Zion, will ultimately judge all nations.

It is easy to see why later interpreters have been loath to see in these so-called "enthronement" Pss any reference to a human king. But I am convinced that we need not accept popular ideas about annual re-enthronement feasts<sup>22</sup> or excessive conclusions of the myth and ritual school<sup>23</sup> to appreciate the valid growth and development of this idea in the ongoing history of Israel. I submit that the concept of royal priesthood, which began with Melchizedek, continued to grow, though unconsciously, in the non-royal figures of Moses and Samuel, and came to full flower when the monarchy was established in Zion under the covenant God gave to David (2 Sam 7). If such hymns as Pss 2 and 110 were indeed used in the enthronement of Judean monarchs, it was with the continued hope that each subsequent king would be "the one who would come." That none of the Judean kings ever fully lived up to the expectation made the longing for

<sup>20</sup> See E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, 1847, repr. 1970.

<sup>21</sup> Such an exegesis has been done by R. Tournay, "Le Psaume CX," *RB*, 67 (1960), 5-41.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, Cardiff, 1967, or S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2 vols., Nashville, ET 1962.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. S. H. Hooke, *Prophets and Priests*, London, 1938, pp. 8-10, for a typical statement of royal priesthood based on the place of the king in (1) the death and resurrection of a god ceremony, and (2) a sacred ritual marriage. Hooke does note some valid distinctions between the king-priest and his function, and the Levitical or cultic priests and theirs.



one who would do so all the more intense. Thus, when John the Baptist puts his very poignant question to our Lord (Matt 11:3), it is with these years of expectation and longing, and constant frustration, in mind.

Returning to the history of royal priesthood, it is my belief that Ps 110 was used in early times, and that both David and Solomon were conscious of holding a priestly investiture that was different from that of the Levitical order. After their time the picture of an ideal priest-king becomes less, rather than more, credible, until finally in the course of history the line of David seems to have disappeared completely in Babylonian exile. But even then, a few sparks of hope (e.g. the Jehoiachin survival and restoration, 2 Kgs 25:27-30) appeared, and after the exile the priest-king ideology is clearly a part of the prophetic message of Zechariah (especially Zech 6:9-14)<sup>24</sup> and possibly Haggai. Again, hopes were dashed, and no ideal priest-king appeared. In the Hasmonean line of Judas Maccabeus, the priest-king ideology becomes a reality, but by the time of the actual investiture of Simon Maccabeus or more properly his son John Hyrcanus with the dual office, many pious observers had lost their hopes for any truly messianic figure to come from the line. It is in light of this long history of the idea that the NT writer of the letter to the Hebrews has developed the concept of our Lord's priestly ministry "after the order of Melchizedek." To deny that David and Solomon were priests, or that David's sons could have been priests, is to break one of the important links in this chain.

In conclusion I would like to suggest that we have evidence for several "orders" of priesthood operative in early Israel, possibly connected with the status of the individual priest (Levite, royal figure, prophetic figure) and possibly relating to particular shrines (Gilgal, Shiloh, Gibeon, Nob, Jerusalem). Samuel seems to have functioned as a priest both of the Gilgal shrine (1 Sam 13:8-15) and at Ramah (1 Sam 9:12-14). Whether he was a Levite or not remains debatable. The Levitical orders, represented in Davidic times by Zadok and Abiathar, were variously connected with Shiloh, Bethel,<sup>25</sup> Nob (until Saul's time), Gibeon, and later, Jerusalem. The royal priesthood, patterned after Melchizedek, who was certainly believed to have been connected with earlier kingship in Jerusalem, evidently did not function in Saul's court at Gibeon, but did become operative in David's Jerusalem. Whether there was any connection between a continuing Jebusite priesthood in Jerusalem or not has been debated at length, but usually in relation to Zadok. I would suggest that, inasmuch as Zadok is related to the cult at Gibeon and not originally Jerusalem, a more fruitful search would be for links between the Davidic royal priesthood and Jebusite priests from the line of Melchizedek. David's son Solomon became a priest after this order and his elder son Adonijah attempted to function as such. Whether Ira the Jairite and Zabud ben Nathan were also of this order must remain a mystery.

The question of why Saul, of all the civil leaders of his era, is denied

<sup>24</sup> Emerton, "The Riddle of Genesis XIV," pp. 414-20, argues that there is no real evidence for a priest-king before the Hasmonean period and Zech 6:9-11 is a corrupt text.

<sup>25</sup> In the Judg 20:26-27 reference, Bethel may not refer to the city by that name but rather should be translated "house of God."

priestly functions remains an intriguing one. Possibly Saul's rejection at Gilgal was for attempting to violate the perquisites of another order. On the other hand, it is possible that, since Jerusalem was the seat of the Melchizedek tradition, Saul's court at Gibeah never did have any claim to a royal priesthood.

Another question that inevitably comes to mind is where, besides from an old Melchizedek tradition, did David get his concept of kingship, especially in light of other Canaanite traditions on the subject. I have not gone into this matter, not because I believe it to be unimportant or irrelevant, but rather because much of the work in this area has been done. Aelred Cody is only the latest in a series of scholars who have suggested links with Canaanite (or Egyptian or Babylonian) royal ideology, and his study merits consideration.<sup>26</sup> That David's priesthood has legitimate analogies with, and possibly roots in, Canaanite practice I would not deny. But I believe that the basic sense of David's royal priesthood comes from the Melchizedek concept and that this in the ongoing revelation of God picks up the thread that is so beautifully woven into the tapestry of our Lord's life and work in the letter to the Hebrews.

<sup>26</sup>Cody, *History*, pp. 98-107.