

The Riddle and Role of the Prince in Ezekiel's Vision of Israel's Future

Ezekiel 44:1–3; 45:1–8a, 16–17; 46:1–18

Veritas Adult Community

College Church

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Regulations Regarding the Outer East Gate

¹ Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one that faces east; but it was closed. ² Then YHWH said to me, “This gate must remain closed; it shall not be opened! And no human is to enter through it because YHWH the God of Israel has entered by it. Therefore it must remain closed. ³ But the prince, and only the prince, may sit in it to eat a meal before YHWH. He may enter through the vestibule of the gateway, but he must exit by the same way.

Regulations Regarding Priestly and Princely Lands

^{45:1} When you subdivide the land as a grant, from the land you shall reserve a gift for YHWH. It shall be a holy district, 25,000 cubits long, and 20,000 cubits wide. It shall be holy throughout its entire area. ² Of this area a full square 500 cubits by 500 cubits shall be reserved for the sanctuary. The sanctuary in turn shall be surrounded by an open space fifty cubits deep. ³ And from this measured off area you shall measure off [an area] 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits wide, in which shall stand the sanctuary, the most holy place of all. ⁴ It is sacred, set off from the land. It shall be designated for the priests who serve in the sanctuary, and who approach YHWH to serve him. It shall be a place for their houses, as well as the holy area for the sanctuary. ⁵ An additional property 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits wide shall belong to the Levites who take care of the Temple. It shall belong to them as their possession, their cities to live in.

⁶ Alongside the sacred reserve, you shall set aside the city property, 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long. It shall belong to the entire house of Israel.

⁷ And [you shall set aside space] for the prince, on each side of the holy reserve and the city property, in front of the holy reserve on the west and east sides. Its length shall correspond to the [tribal] territories from the western border to the eastern border ⁸ of the land. And it shall be his possession in Israel.

A Challenge for the “Princes” and Businessmen

No longer shall my princes oppress my people, but they shall permit the house of Israel to have the land according to their tribes. ⁹ This is what the Lord YHWH has declared: You have gone far enough, O princes of Israel! Put a stop to your violence and abuse. Practise what is just and right. Put an end to your evictions of my people—the declaration of the Lord YHWH.

¹⁰ You shall maintain honest weights, and an honest ephah, and an honest bath. ¹¹ The ephah and the bath shall be the same size, with the bath holding one tenth of a homer, and the ephah holding one tenth of a homer.

Their capacities shall be based on the size of the homer. ¹² The shekel shall weigh 20 gerahs. Twenty shekels plus twenty-five shekels plus fifteen shekels shall make up the minah for you.

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¹⁶ All the people of the land are obligated to the prince in Israel in presenting this offering. ¹⁷ But the prince shall be responsible for the whole burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the libations at the festivals, the new moon celebrations, the sabbaths, and all the other appointed convocations of the house of Israel. He shall provide the purification offerings, the grain offerings, the whole burnt offerings, and the peace offerings, to make atonement on behalf of the house of Israel.

Other Festivals

^{46:1} Thus has the Lord YHWH declared: The gate of the inner court that faces east shall remain closed during the six working days. But on the Sabbath day it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened. ² The prince shall enter from the outside by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and he shall stop next to the doorpost of the gate, while the priests present his whole burnt offering and his peace offerings. Then he shall prostrate himself on the threshold of the gate and make his exit. But the gate shall not be closed until the evening. ³ The people of the land shall prostrate themselves before YHWH at the entrance of that gate on the sabbaths and the new moon festivals. ⁴ And the whole burnt offering that the prince presents to YHWH on the Sabbath day shall consist of six lambs without defect and a ram without defect. ⁵ A grain offering of one ephah shall accompany the ram, whereas the grain offering accompanying the lambs shall be as much as he can afford. A hin of oil shall accompany each ephah. ⁶ On the day of the new moon the offering shall consist of a young bull without defect, six lambs, and a ram without defect. ⁷ As a grain offering, he shall present an ephah for the bull and an ephah for the ram, whereas for the lambs he shall bring whatever he can afford. A hin of oil shall accompany each ephah. ⁸ When the prince enters, he shall come in by way of the vestibule of the gateway; and he shall exit by the same way. ⁹ When the people of the land come before YHWH at the appointed celebrations, anyone who enters by way of the north gate to worship shall leave by way of the south gate. And whoever enters by way of the south gate shall leave by way of the north gate. They shall not go back through the same gate by which they entered. They shall indeed exit through the opposite gate. ¹⁰ And the prince

shall come in among them when they enter, and he shall exit among them when they leave.

¹¹ At the pilgrim festivals and at the appointed celebrations the grain offering accompanying the bull shall be an ephah, and for the ram it shall be and ephah. But for the lambs it shall be whatever he can afford. A hin of oil shall accompany each ephah.

¹² Whenever the prince presents a voluntary whole burnt offering or voluntary peace offerings to YHWH, the gate that faces east shall be opened for him. Then he shall present his whole burnt offering and his peace offerings exactly as he does on the Sabbath day. Afterwards he shall leave, and when he has made his exit, the gate shall be closed behind him.

¹³ You shall provide a one-year-old lamb without defect for the whole burnt offering to YHWH daily. You shall provide it every morning. ¹⁴ And every morning you shall provide with it a grain offering, consisting of one-sixth of an ephah and one-third of a hin of oil to moisten the flour. It is a grain offering for YHWH, a permanent ordinance. ¹⁵ Thus they shall present the lamb and the grain offering, and the oil every morning as a regular whole burnt offering.

Regulations Regarding the Management of Royal Lands

¹⁶ Thus has the Lord YHWH declared: If the prince presents a gift to each of his sons as an inheritance, it shall belong to his sons. It shall be their possession by inheritance. ¹⁷ And if he presents a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall belong to him until the year of liberation, when it shall return to the prince. His sons shall by all means keep their inheritance. ¹⁸ The prince may not seize any of the peoples' inheritance by evicting them from their property. He must grant the inheritance to his sons from his own property so that none of my people are dispossessed of their property.

Exposition

Introduction

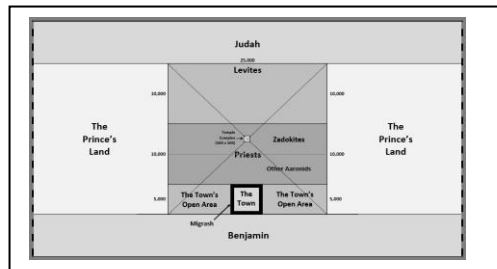
A. Who is this enigmatic figure?

The Hebrew word *naśî'*, from a verb "to lift up, to elevate," hence "elevated, promoted one."

B. What is the prince's role and function in the temple and temple worship?

1. The *naśî'* alone may sit in the gateway and eat his sacrificial meals there (44:1-3).
2. The *naśî'* receives a special territorial grant, separate from the tribal allotments (45:7-9; 48:21).

3. The *naśî'* provides the animals, grain, and oil for the offerings, which are presented on his and the people's behalf (45:21–25).
4. On weekly sabbaths and new moon celebrations the *naśî'* may enter the eastern gateway of the inner court through the vestibule, stand by the post of the gate (46:1–7, 12).
5. At the appointed festivals the *naśî'* enters the sacred precinct with the rest of the lay worshippers (46:8–10).
6. The *naśî'* may present additional voluntary offerings to YHWH just as he did with the Sabbath and new moon offerings (46:12).
7. The *naśî'* may present portions of his property to his sons as their permanent possessions.
8. The *naśî'* may not confiscate property of the people and give it to his sons as their own (46:18).



C. What resources were available to the prince to fulfill his role?

1. Divine authorization to sit in the outer gate and eat his sacrificial meals there.
2. Divine gift of land on either side of the sacred square reserve as his possession (*'ăḥuzzâ*).
3. Divine appointment as custodian of the people's offerings (*těrumâ*, 45:16–17).
4. Divine authorization to enter the gateway of the inner court to observe the priests as present offerings on the Sabbath day, when the gate is opened (46:1–10).
5. Divine authorization to enter the inner gate any day and offer his whole burnt and peace offerings (46:12).
6. Divine authorization to grant his sons his property as their inheritance in perpetuity, but if he grants it to a servant it must return to the prince in the year of liberation (Jubilee; 46:16–18).

D. Implications of these Policies Regarding the Prince

1. Regarding Ezekiel's disposition toward the monarchy
2. Regarding this "prince" and the one in 34 and 37
 - a. Israelite messianic expectations were by definition monarchic in character, and immutably based upon YHWH's dynastic covenant with David.
 - b. Israelite messianism linked the Messiah closely with Jerusalem/Zion.
 - c. Israelite messianism perceived the Messiah as sovereign over the entire universe.
 - d. Israel's Messiah is always portrayed in glorious idealistic terms (34:23–24 and 37:27–25).
3. The primary concern in this vision is not political, but cultic.
Here the prince functions as YHWH's appointed lay patron and sponsor of the cult.
4. These texts remind those who occupy positions of leadership in the community of faith and those who are led by persons with that leadership is a service vocation, not a profession of privilege.