

Ezek. 44:1 Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it *was* shut.

Ezek. 44:2 Then said the LORD unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.

All my life I have heard it taught that the Eastern Gate which is now sealed shut will stay that way until the Lord comes to enter the temple through that gate. This study of Ezekiel has now changed my acceptance of that teaching. This temple complex is being built after the fact and is going to cover much more ground than the current area allows. The current gate is a good object lesson and focal point for thinking about the Lord's return to Jerusalem to rule from the temple, but I do not believe it is the gate being referenced here.

When the Lord returns to the temple, it will be to the new millennial temple, and it will be for good. The emphasis during the Lord's reign will be on righteousness and holiness. Though God is choosing to dwell with His people in the person of His Son at that time, men must understand that God/Jesus is holy in and of Himself. Man's righteousness or holiness is only attainable through the Son. This entrance of the Lord is to be distinctly for the use of the Lord.

Why the east? My reasoning--The sun rises in the east, and the sun represents light and goodness and life and the dawning of a new day. The Son will assume His throne from the east, and He too represents light and goodness and life and the dawning of a new age on planet earth.

Ezek. 44:3 *It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.*

The prophet here introduces "the prince." Previous reading has already shown me that this person is going to raise some questions. I'm content to recognize him as God's designee to represent Him in matters of the kingdom as instructed. As the Lord's representative, he will be allowed to enter and exit through a door that accesses the porch that is part of the Eastern Gate entry to the temple complex—but not through the gate proper. The prince will use this entrance to "eat bread before the LORD." This raises many other questions, mostly trivial, that I am not going to consider at this time. I accept this person to be sovereignly chosen for special relationship to the Lord during the Kingdom age.

Ezek. 44:4 Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD: and I fell upon my face.

Ezekiel is then taken to the north gate "before the house." I would assume that this means he is in the outer court facing the temple proper. Ezekiel then witnesses a wonderful sight. The glory of the LORD again fills His house. What a wonderful hope for the prophet who witnessed the sad exit of God's glory from the house much earlier in his ministry. The sight causes Ezekiel to fall on his face in worship.

Ezek. 44:5 And the LORD said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the LORD, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary.

The Lord now instructs Ezekiel to make careful note of all that He is going to see and hear concerning the ordinances and laws associated with the administration and function of the temple, the house of the Lord. He is to make special note of the rules concerning entering and exiting the sanctuary.

This speaks to me of God's sovereign right to control access to His presence. Jesus is the only door of access for mankind. As long as sin is present on planet earth, the strict rules of access to the temple will serve as a reminder of God's sovereignty and of His provision for man's righteousness through salvation only by faith in His Son. It is only through His imputed righteousness that we can access God's presence. In other words, God sovereignly makes the rules; we can only fellowship with Him according to His rules.

Ezek. 44:6 And thou shalt say to the rebellious, *even* to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations,

Ezek. 44:7 In that ye have brought *into my sanctuary* strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, *even* my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.

Ezek. 44:8 And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves.

The Lord now gives the prophet a message of rebuke for the people of Israel. He is tired of the disgusting ways they had profaned His holy things. They had managed the temple according to their own desires and convenience. They had brought *strangers* into His temple. These strangers are identified as "uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh." The NIV Commentary made note that the Israelites had utilized foreigners in temple service under Joshua and David and that this was common among ancient religions of the Near East. Though they had started out as water carriers and servants to the Levites, it would seem that they had gradually been allowed to assume some of the priestly duties.

I think more to the point is the phrase "uncircumcised in heart." Circumcision in the flesh of the Jewish people was supposed to represent a circumcised heart, a heart yielded to God as Lord. Most of the priests of the Lord during Isaiah and Ezekiel's times had become uncircumcised in their heart. They were no longer serving as unto the Lord, but as unto themselves and to court the pleasure of the people. They had broken covenant with God.

Ezek. 44:9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.

This verse would indicate that no one will enter the temple who is uncircumcised in the flesh or uncircumcised in the heart. It would seem that all men will be

expected to circumcise the flesh as evidence of a circumcised heart if they want to have access to the temple.

Ezek. 44:10 And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity.

Ezek. 44:11 Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, *having* charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them.

Ezek. 44:12 Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity; therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their iniquity.

Ezek. 44:13 And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy *place*: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed.

Ezek. 44:14 But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein.

This is another sobering section of scripture. Just as the sons of Zadok are going to be rewarded for the faithfulness of their ancestors, the rest of the Levites are going to be limited in service because of the rebellion of their ancestors. The Levites had been privileged to be chosen as priests before the Lord. They had failed miserably in their responsibilities. They had not taken a stand before the people against idol worship and had not led them away from their sin, but deeper into it. Because of that heritage, the Levites would be limited to serving at the gates and other tasks necessary for upkeep of the temple and slaughtering the sacrifices. They would no longer be allowed to serve as priests. Still to serve in any capacity in the house of God is a privilege. I am reminded of a verse in Psalms.

Psa. 84:10 For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Ezek. 44:15 But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD:

Ezek. 44:16 They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.

As learned earlier, only the Levites descended through Zadok would be allowed to serve as priests in the millennial temple in honor of the faithfulness of their faithful ancestors. Again, this is another wow statement. God will have no problem identifying those who qualify as a result of their ancestry—even though there have been no genealogical records of the nation as a whole kept since they were destroyed with the temple in AD70.

Ezek. 44:17 And it shall come to pass, *that* when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall

come upon them, whiles they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within.

Ezek. 44:18 They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird *themselves* with any thing that causeth sweat.

Ezek. 44:19 And when they go forth into the utter court, *even* into the utter court to the people, they shall put off their garments wherein they ministered, and lay them in the holy chambers, and they shall put on other garments; and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments.

The priests will wear specific garments as well. They are to be made of linen. Wool is specifically mentioned as not being acceptable. The emphasis seems to be that the garments do not cause the priest to sweat. This, I believe, is a statement regarding our position before the Lord. Nothing that we have done contributes to our salvation in any way. Jesus has done all the work required for our redemption. Our service before Him is a privilege and not a burden. The priests are to picture that truth as they serve before the Lord in the millennial temple.

The linen also represents purity. Although the word for linen used here is not specific, the Hebrew for the word "linen" used in Exodus regarding the garments for Aaron and his sons indicates "bleached stuff, i.e., white linen." This also emphasizes the holiness and purity that the Lord imputes to each of us as part of a "holy priesthood."

1Pet. 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

It is also specified that the priests not wear their garments outside the inner court of the temple; they are to be left in "the holy chambers." This makes sense to me in that they are still ministering on an earth in which man still possesses the sin nature at birth.

"they shall not sanctify...garments." – This indicates that touching the garments would produce a change in anyone it touched. The NIV Commentary states the following:

"Contact with a holy thing consecrates. A person or object enters into the state of holiness by touching a holy thing and thus becomes subject to the restrictions of holiness to which other holy people or objects are subject."

Ex. 29:37 Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.

Lev. 6:26 The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Lev. 6:27 Whatsoever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be holy: and when there is sprinkled of the blood thereof upon any garment, thou shalt wash that whereon it was sprinkled in the holy place.

This is still confusing to me. I understand the importance of emphasizing the difference between what is holy and what is not. I understand why the Lord guarded the tree of life so as to protect man from eating of it and remaining in his sinful state eternally. I don't understand why being made holy would be a bad thing, unless it would mean that one would have to be put to death rather than be allowed to go back and live among the unholy. I tried to find some commentary from a Jewish perspective, but struck out.

Ezek. 44:20 Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads.

Ezek. 44:21 Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court.

Ezek. 44:22 Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before.

Regulations for the priests continue.

- They are not to shave their heads.
- They are not to grow long hair.
- They are to keep their hair cut.
- They are not to drink wine while in the inner court.
- They may not marry widows or divorcees.
- They are only to marry Israeli virgins or widows of a priest.

I don't really see why the length of the hair matters, except as an act of obedience and submission. Commentaries make note that shaving the head was a sign of mourning and long hair is associated with pagan societies. Thus, maintaining a clean-cut appearance identifies one as happy in his service and proud to be identified with service to the Lord.

Obviously, wine impacts one's ability to function properly.

In the millennium the nation of Israel will function as she was intended from the beginning. The priests that serve in the temple are to be Israeli from a specific line of descent—as established by God in the beginning for service in the tabernacle. Their wives are to be Israeli. Their wives are to be distinctly set apart as being virgins or as having already been married to a priest. This ensures that the God-ordained purpose for marriage as a pure relationship is depicted rightly before the people.

Ezek. 44:23 And they shall teach my people *the difference* between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

I think this verse sums up the purpose for all the rules and regulations pertaining to the priests—to teach the people to discern between what is holy and what is not, between what is clean and what is not.

Ezek. 44:24 And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; *and* they shall judge it according to my judgments: and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my sabbaths.

This verse tells us that the priests are also to serve as judges. They will make the final ruling regarding any disputes that may arise regarding God's laws and

statutes. These judgments are to be according to God's judgments—not according to their own reasoning. This tells me that they will be given specific guidelines and instruction themselves as to how to judge correctly. The Hebrew for the word *assemblies* shows that it is referencing the *feasts* of Israel. In the millennium, the Sabbath will again be recognized as a day holy unto the Lord. Unlike their past history, the priests of Israel will once again lead their people in right relationship before the Lord.

Ezek. 44:25 And they shall come at no dead person to defile themselves: but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister that hath had no husband, they may defile themselves.

Ezek. 44:26 And after he is cleansed, they shall reckon unto him seven days.

Ezek. 44:27 And in the day that he goeth into the sanctuary, unto the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering, saith the Lord GOD.

As a general rule, priests will not be present at funeral homes or funerals since it would render them unclean. They are allowed, however, to attend to father, mother, son, daughter, brother, or unmarried sister. It will require that they go through a 7-day cleansing process before reassuming their duties as priest. The priest will be required to offer a sin offering in the inner court on the day he returns to service to complete his process of purification.

Ezek. 44:28 And it shall be unto them for an inheritance: I *am* their inheritance: and ye shall give them no possession in Israel: I *am* their possession.

Ezek. 44:29 They shall eat the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; and every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs.

Ezek. 44:30 And the first of all the firstfruits of all *things*, and every oblation of all, of every *sort* of your oblations, shall be the priest's: ye shall also give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house.

Ezek. 44:31 The priests shall not eat of any thing that is dead of itself, or torn, whether it be fowl or beast.

As in Old Testament times, the priests will have no land inheritance allotted to them. They will need no land to farm or work since they will be provided for through their service to the Lord. They will benefit from the firstfruits and offerings that are brought by the people in obedience to the Lord. Those who give accordingly will be blessed with *rest/peace/comfort* (all from the Hebrew).

Point is made that the priests are not to eat any meat that has died naturally and been killed other than through the process of sacrifice to the Lord. Again, this emphasizes that everything associated with God's name and His provision for the people is to be clean and holy.