EZEKIEL

Chapter 44

*The Prince, the Levites, the Priests*

**Then the man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut.  2 The LORD said to me, “This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it.  3 The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the LORD. He is to enter by way of the portico of the gateway and go out the same way.” 4 Then the man brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple. I looked and saw the glory of the LORD filling the temple of the LORD, and I fell facedown. 5 The LORD said to me, “Son of man, look carefully, listen closely and give attention to everything I tell you concerning all the regulations regarding the temple of the LORD. Give attention to the entrance of the temple and all the exits of the sanctuary.  6 Say to the rebellious house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Enough of your detestable practices, O house of Israel!  7 In addition to all your other detestable practices, you brought foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh into my sanctuary, desecrating my temple while you offered me food, fat and blood, and you broke my covenant.  8 Instead of carrying out your duty in regard to my holy things, you put others in charge of my sanctuary.  9 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh is to enter my sanctuary, not even the foreigners who live among the Israelites. 10 ”‘The Levites who went far from me when Israel went astray and who wandered from me after their idols must bear the consequences of their sin.  11 They may serve in my sanctuary, having charge of the gates of the temple and serving in it; they may slaughter the burnt offerings and sacrifices for the people and stand before the people and serve them.  12 But because they served them in the presence of their idols and made the house of Israel fall into sin, therefore I have sworn with uplifted hand that they must bear the consequences of their sin, declares the Sovereign LORD.  13 They are not to come near to serve me as priests or come near any of my holy things or my most holy offerings; they must bear the shame of their detestable practices.  14 Yet I will put them in charge of the duties of the temple and all the work that is to be done in it. 15 ”‘But the priests, who are Levites and descendants of Zadok and who faithfully carried out the duties of my sanctuary when the Israelites went astray from me, are to come near to minister before me; they are to stand before me to offer sacrifices of fat and blood, declares the Sovereign LORD.  16 They alone are to enter my sanctuary; they alone are to come near my table to minister before me and perform my service. 17 ”‘When they enter the gates of the inner court, they are to wear linen clothes; they must not wear any woolen garment while ministering at the gates of the inner court or inside the temple.  18 They are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists. They must not wear anything that makes them perspire.  19 When they go out into the outer court where the people are, they are to take off the clothes they have been ministering in and are to leave them in the sacred rooms, and put on other clothes, so that they do not consecrate the people by means of their garments. 20 ”‘They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow long, but they are to keep the hair of their heads trimmed.  21 No priest is to drink wine when he enters the inner court.  22 They must not marry widows or divorced women; they may marry only virgins of Israelite descent or widows of priests.  23 They are to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean. 24 ”‘In any dispute, the priests are to serve as judges and decide it according to my ordinances. They are to keep my laws and my decrees for all my appointed feasts, and they are to keep my Sabbaths holy. 25 ”‘A priest must not defile himself by going near a dead person; however, if the dead person was his father or mother, son or daughter, brother or unmarried sister, then he may defile himself.  26 After he is cleansed, he must wait seven days.  27 On the day he goes into the inner court of the sanctuary to minister in the sanctuary, he is to offer a sin offering for himself, declares the Sovereign LORD. 28 ”‘I am to be the only inheritance the priests have. You are to give them no possession in Israel; I will be their possession.  29 They will eat the grain offerings, the sin offerings and the guilt offerings; and everything in Israel devoted to the LORD will belong to them.  30 The best of all the firstfruits and of all your special gifts will belong to the priests. You are to give them the first portion of your ground meal so that a blessing may rest on your household.  31 The priests must not eat anything, bird or animal, found dead or torn by wild animals.**

Chapter 44 consists of three parts. The first verses (44:1–3) continue the temple tour from the preceding chapters (Ezekiel 40–43). Then in 44:4–5 comes a brief reference to the Glory “incarnated” in the eschatological temple, whose return Ezekiel had witnessed in 43:1–12, along with a solemn admonition, predicated on the presence of the Glory, to pay close attention to the following instructions. Finally, Yahweh, speaking in the first person, issues detailed commands in 44:6–31 regarding the legitimate ministerial roles of the Levites and the Zadokite priests for worship at the temple. More commands will come in 45:1–46:18, and the temple tour will not resume until 46:19. (CC)

**44:1** The Qal passive participle סָגוּר, “closed,” occurs three times in 44:1–2, indicating the main theme. The “closed” eastern gate may be intended as an introduction to the following ordinances (44:6–31) dealing with access to the sacred precincts and proper decorum inside them. The emphasis on restricted access and holiness may explain why 44:1 uses “the sanctuary” (הַמִּקְרָּשׁ֙, from the verb קָדַשׁ, “to be holy”) for the complex of structures on the mountain (40:2) that constituted the temple compound. “Sanctuary” (מִקְרָּשׁ) will be the usual term in this chapter (44:1, 5, 7–9, 11, 15–16) and will be common later (45:3–4, 18; 47:12; 48:8, 10, 21). Previously in chapters 40–48, the common term had been בַּיִת, “house, temple, temple area,” and “sanctuary” (מִקְרָּשׁ) had not been used except in 43:21, where it referred to the temple itself. Of course, the advent and presence of the Glory (43:1–12; 44:4) had changed the temple’s quality. (CC)

“He brought me back” (וַיָּ֣שֶׁב אֹתִ֗י) is the first instance of a new Hebrew form of the guidance formula. The clause here is equivalent to the same verb with suffix, וַיְשִׁבֵנִי, in 47:1, 6. Usually the guidance formula employs a verb with an object suffix, but אֵת with a suffix was also used in 40:1, 3. (CC)

**44:2** *It is to remain shut because.*† The reason given here is that God entered through the east gate (43:1–2), thus making it holy. Related reasons may be that God would never again leave as before (10:19; 11:23) and that sun worship would be made impossible (see 8:16). Today the east gate (called the Golden Gate) of the sacred Moslem area (*Haram esh-Sharif*) in Jerusalem is likewise sealed shut as a result of a later related tradition. (CSB)

This verse emphasizes the vast distance between the Creator and his creatures by the only instance in the book of the full title “Yahweh, the God of Israel.” Also conveying that emphasis is the unusual word order of the initial clause, וַיֹּ֨אמֶר אֵלַ֜י יְהוָ֗ה (repeated at the start of 44:5, where Ezekiel is addressed as “son of man”), which could be translated, “and he—Yahweh—said to me.” Normally the subject would immediately follow the verb, as in 23:36: וַיֹּ֚אמֶר יְהוָה֙ אֵלַ֔י. Even though this emphasizes that Yahweh is the ultimate speaker, since the supernatural guide (40:4; 43:6; but unmentioned in chapter 44) has been God’s accredited spokesman all along, his agency is not necessarily excluded here. (CC)

**44:3** *prince.* The first mention of the prince in chs. 40–48 (see 34:24 and note). (CSB)

*to eat.* Probably his part of the fellowship offering (see Lev 7:15; Dt 12:7; see also Eze 43:27 and note). While this honor is accorded the prince, it is significant that he is given no other part in the ceremonial functions, reserved now solely for the priests (see 2Ch 26:16–20). (CSB)

*by way of the portico.* From the inside of the outer court. (CSB)

The best explanation for the varying descriptions of the Prince would seem to be similar to what we have noted before. The eschatological revelation given to Ezekiel often concentrates more on the “not yet” than on what is “now” fulfilled in Christ. The beauty and finality of the messianic age inaugurated by Jesus comes through clearly enough in Ezekiel, but it is still expressed in OT language. God’s OT depiction of the coming Messiah is still concerned with alleviating the arrogant abuses perpetrated by Israel’s kings and priests, and so the Messiah, while clearly a royal and priestly figure, is portrayed in humble, understated terms. Thus in chapters 40–48, he is the “Prince” instead of the “King” (only in 37:22, 24), and Zadokite priests are also present in addition to the priestly “Prince.” We in the church today can resonate with that same concern: in some respects the Messiah is a King and Priest who is unlike (even the opposite of) some of the leaders and clergy now present in the church militant. All members of the church on earth are “saint and sinner simultaneously” (*simul iustus et peccator*). Moreover, adherents of many denominations and factions of what we confess to be “the one holy catholic and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed) often comport themselves in ways that are scarcely “holy” and “apostolic,” and many will disinherit themselves entirely from God’s kingdom unless they repent and are renewed in faith and life (cf. 1 Cor 6:9–11; Gal 5:19–21). (CC)

**44:4** fresh encounter with Yahweh’s Glory, now resident in the temple, ushers in a new section, in its full scope comprising the rest of the chapter. The overriding concern is still control of access to the sanctuary, but after a rebuke for Israel’s past failures, the chapter moves into fairly detailed regulations, in the form of divine speech, regarding temple service by the Levites and priests. Ezek 44:4–5 serves as a sort of preamble. Formally, 44:4 is very similar to 43:3, 5 and 44:5 to 40:4. (CC)

Ezekiel does not specify whether he was taken to the outer or inner north gate, but since the gates of the inner court were eight steps (about four cubits) higher than the outer gates (40:31, 34, 37), the temple would only be visible from the inner court. Neither does Ezekiel give any detailed description of the “Glory” here, but he had already done so in chapters 1 and 10–11, and to a lesser extent in 43:1–12, so here it sufficed merely to identify the “Glory of Yahweh” as the subject. Ezekiel’s reaction, “I fell on my face” (44:4), is the same as it had been on previous occasions when he had seen Yahweh’s Glory (1:28; 3:23; 43:3). (CC)

**44:5** The verse is virtually a summary of major concerns of not only this section, but of all the lessons to be learned from the temple measurements in chapters 40–43 (cf. 40:4; 43:10). Yahweh is described as speaking directly to Ezekiel, although it is possible that he does so through the supernatural guide (40:4; 43:6). (CC)

שִׂ֣ים לִבְּךָ֩, literally, “set your heart,” is idiomatic Hebrew for “pay attention.” Linked here with stress on the use of both his visual and his aural faculties, it emphasizes the need to reflect deeply upon the inward, theological import of the regulations. The Hebrew has a chiastic structure: “see with your eyes, and with your ears hear.” (CC)

**44:6** The first clause, וְאָמַרְתָּ֤ אֶל־מֶ֙רִי֨, literally, “and you shall say to the rebellion,” uses the abstract noun מְרִי (in pause, מֶ֙רִי֨) in a concrete sense. Normally elsewhere in Ezekiel, Yahweh speaks of Israel as בֵּית מְרִי (sometimes with the article), “(the) house of rebellion” or “(the) rebellious house,” a condemning substitute for “the house of Israel,” which is in the next clause of 44:6, the appositional “to the house of Israel.” Likewise, in 2:7–8 Yahweh twice used מְרִי concretely (literally, “they are rebellion,” and, speaking to Ezekiel, “do not be rebellion”). Supplying “house” in the first clause here in 44:6, as did the LXX gives a smoother translation, but the difference is slight. (CC)

רַב־לָכֶ֛ם מִֽכָּל־תּוֹעֲבֽוֹתֵיכֶ֖ם, literally, “much to you from all your abominations,” uses two idioms, the adjectiveרַב and the preposition מִן, each of which can be used by itself in an elliptical comparison to mean “too much.” The idiom רַב־לָכֶם is also in 45:9, as well as, for example, Num 16:3, 7. The following מִן adds the emphasis of “*more* than enough” (cf. the obverse idiom with נָקֵל in 8:17; cf. also Is 49:6). This might be paraphrased as “I have had more than enough of all your abominations.” (CC)

**44:7** *uncircumcised in heart.* Spiritually unfit. (CSB)

However, this is not the only place where the OT stresses that not just the flesh, but also the heart must be circumcised (see also on 44:9). In the new covenant in Christ, there is no religious necessity for circumcision of the flesh, as St. Paul argues against the Judaizers, especially in Galatians. Instead, the NT emphasis is on spiritual circumcision through Holy Baptism, faith in Christ, and the life of faith (Gal 3:26–29; Col 2:11–14). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (Gal 5:6 ESV) (CC)

**44:8** The idiom שָׁמַר מִשְׁמֶרֶת (used previously in 40:45–46) is liturgical vocabulary for faithfully performing worship service according to God’s Word. In Ezekiel the emphasis seems to be on the priests as guardians and protectors of God’s holy things, perhaps also involving guard duty at the gates, so it is translated “guard.” It will recur in 44:14–16 and 48:11. Zimmerli finds a wordplay in the two occurrences in the verse of מִשְׁמֶרֶת: the Israelites have not only failed in the “observances” of their own religious obligations, but allowed foreigners to participate in the divine “service” (in the liturgical sense). “My holy things” (קָדָשָׁ֑י) can include everything related to the realm of the sacred. It is too broad a term to make a more precise application here. (CC)

**44:9** *No foreigner uncircumcised … is to enter my sanctuary.* Nehemiah enforced this restriction when he dismissed Tobiah (Ne 13:8), an Ammonite (Ne 2:10; see Dt 23:3). Foreigners could, however, be a part of Israel (see 47:22). (CSB)

Anyone who was not both physically and spiritually circumcised must be kept at a distance from the sanctuary. Only God could spiritually circumcise a person’s heart (Deut 30:6), and the same emphasis on God’s gracious action is expressed in Ezekiel using the only slightly different language of a “new S/spirit” and “new heart” in 11:19; 36:25–26. Here too, the NT fulfillment is accomplished through the Sacrament of Christian Baptism, the antitype of circumcision (Col 2:11–13). Through baptismal incorporation into Christ, the division between Israelite and (Gentile) foreigner is overcome, so that both, as baptized believers, may approach God in holiness as his justified children (e.g., Acts 2:38–39; Gal 3:26–29; Eph 2:11–22; 4:5). The prohibition here of access to the temple by the uncircumcised may be compared to the eschatological banishment of unbelievers from the new Jerusalem in the eternal state in Rev 22:15. (CC)

**44:10** *Levites.* Members of the tribe of Levi served as priests from the earliest days (see Dt 33:8–11; Jdg 17:13). (CSB)

*when Israel went astray.* The reference is mainly to the period of the monarchy, especially to the last years, during which Ezekiel so often criticized the people’s idolatry (see 6:3–6; 14:3–11; 16:18–21; 23:36–49; 36:17–18; 37:23). (CSB)

At the golden calf incident, the Levites had remained loyal to Yahweh (Ex 32:25–29). God elected the entire tribe, as a collective “firstborn” from all the tribes (Num 3:41, 45; 8:15–19), to be his ministerial servants (Ex 32:29; Num 1:49–53; Deut 10:8–9). He had established their office as a kind of covenant (Jer 33:21; Mal 2:4–5; Neh 13:29). In particular, the Levites were charged with protecting the holiness of the sanctuary by preventing lay access (Num 18:21–23). But now the Levites are charged with having gone astray from Yahweh by participating in idolatry with “fecal deities” (Ezek 44:10, 12). This participation was both by active involvement in priestly service before idols, and, passively, by failing to oppose and curtail idolatry. Examples of such apostasy can be found throughout the history of the existence of the tabernacle (Moses to Solomon) and temple (Solomon to Ezekiel’s day). Already in Moses’ lifetime Korah, from the tribe of Levi, led a large number of Israelites into perdition (Numbers 16). Throughout the long periods of mass syncretism and apostasy recorded in Kings, the Levites were undoubtedly just as culpable as the unfaithful priests. (CC)

**44:11** *stand before the people.* Cf. standing before the Lord (see v. 15); the Levites still had an honorable position. (CSB)

The Piel of the verb שָׁרַת, “to serve,” occurs three times in this verse, giving three duties to all the non-Zadokite Levites. At least the first two times, the verb is a technical term for liturgical service in general. Thus the (non-Zadokite) Aaronites who formerly were priests are demoted to the same level as non-priestly Levites. They will not be laymen, but, like the other Levites, a class of ministers. They will not stand before Yahweh as priests, but will “stand before them [the people] to serve them.” (CC)

In apposition to מְשָׁ֣רְתִ֔ים, “serving,” is the first duty: פְּקֻרּוֹת֙ אֶל־שַׁעֲרֵ֣י הַבַּ֔יִת, “(as) guards over the gates of the temple.” This duty is summarized by the following וּֽמְשָׁרְתִ֖ים אֶת־הַבָּ֑יִת, “and ministering in the temple.” The feminine abstract noun פְּקֻרָּה, “charge, office,” can be used concretely for a (male) “overseer,” here specifically a “guard.” In 9:1 the angelic פְּקֻרּ֣וֹת were “supervisors” over Jerusalem, who were commissioned to execute Yahweh’s judgment on the unfaithful. In 2 Ki 11:18 the term is used for the guards whom the priest Jehoiada posted around the temple when Joash was proclaimed king and the usurper Athaliah was deposed. (CC)

The second duty is that the slaughter of the sacrificial animals is assigned to the non-Zadokite Levites. According to Leviticus 1 and 3, laymen traditionally had killed their own sacrificial animals, but in Ezekiel’s vision laymen are not even allowed in the inner court. All evidence indicates that in the second temple period laymen continued to do the slaughtering, except probably at major festivals, when enormous numbers of animals were sacrificed. That the strictures in Ezekiel 40–48 were not implemented by Israel after the exile is an indication of the vision’s eschatological orientation; God does not intend for his people to attempt to implement the vision literally (see “Introduction to Ezekiel 40–48”). The same two terms for sacrifice, הָעֹלָ֤ה, “the burnt offering,” and הַזֶּ֨בַח֙, literally, “the sacrifice,” referring to all the other kinds of sacrifices, were in 40:42. (CC)

The third duty is general: “they will stand before them [the people] to serve them” (יַעַמְד֥וּ לִפְנֵיהֶ֖ם לְשָֽׁרְתָֽם). Both suffixes (“them”) refer to the people. This is a technical expression for some official service and recalls Num 16:9, where it is stated that the Levites were commissioned “to stand before the congregation to serve them.” Other contexts speak of all Israel (Lev 9:5; Deut 4:10; 2 Chr 20:13) or the Levites (Deut 10:8) “standing before Yahweh” (עָמַד לִפְנֵי יהוה). (CC)

**44:12** The status and role of the Levites is rehearsed a second time in 44:12–14, but this time with greater accent on their past failures, and in contrast to the role of the Zadokites, which will be spelled out in 44:15–16. Ezek 44:12 has the standard form of a judgment oracle: “because [יַ֗עַן אֲשֶׁ֨ר] … therefore [עַל־כֵּן֩].” The Piel of שָׁרַת, “to serve,” appears again, but with the charge that the Levites’ service had once been in the employ of an idolatrous cult instead of Yahweh, and to the detriment rather than benefit of God’s people, and so the Levites became a stumbling block (cause of sin). יְשָׁרְת֤וּ אוֹתָם֙ (literally, “they served them [the people]”) has a frequentative imperfect. Instead of וְהָי֥וּ(“they became”), we might have expected an imperfect with *waw* consecutive (וַיִּהְיוּ), but such forms declined in Late Biblical Hebrew. The verb forms here may have durative force: “they continually ministered and so always became …” (CC)

The scurrilous term for the dung-idols (גִּלּוּלִים; see the fourth textual note on 6:4) is about as much a part of Ezekiel’s trademark vocabulary as the result to Israel: מִכְשׁוֹל־עָוֹן, literally, “a stumbling block of (which causes) iniquity.” Already KJV paraphrased, “and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity,” and many English translations have essentially followed suit. Consequently, Yahweh “raised [his] hand” to signal an oath—not to bring blessing, as the idiom is often used, but punishment. (Usually, as in 20:5–6, 15, 23, 28, the idiom uses לְ; only here is עַל used.) The use of the signatory formula, “says the Lord Yahweh,” lends decisiveness to the oath. (CC)

**44:13** In this verse the status of the (non-Zadokite) Levites as one rung below the (Zadokite) priests is reaffirmed. The idiom with נָגַשׁ, “to approach, come near,” Yahweh, is often used for the liturgical service of priests (e.g., Ex 19:22; Lev 21:21), and so it, qualified by לְכַהֵ֣ן לִ֔י, “to be a priest for me,” is prohibited for the Levites. Two expressions, “my holy things” (קָ֣דָשַׁ֔י) and “the most holy things/offerings” (קָדְשֵׁ֖י הַקְּדָשִׁ֑ים) are used to describe objects or activities that are reserved for the priests. “Offerings” is used in the translation of the superlative because the superlative was used in Num 18:9 of the same sacrifices listed in Ezek 44:29. In Num 18:3 (as elsewhere in Numbers), the simple “holy things” had been applied to various objects associated with the tabernacle, so the superlative here would likely include temple furnishings too. (CC)

In the light of Ezekiel’s usage of כְּלִמָּה, “disgrace, shame,” it would be a mistake to take the statement that the Levites would “bear their shame” as synonymous with their bearing of their “punishment” (עָוֹן) in 44:10, 12. In 16:52, 54, 63, Ezekiel used כְּלִמָּה, “shame,” in the context of salvation, not judgment. There and here it describes the sense of unworthiness and hence of renewed gratitude and responsibility of a penitent who has been forgiven and restored. The reference to their previous “abominations” (as in 44:6–7) must describe what they are now ashamed of. (CC)

**44:14** As a sort of sequel to 44:11, this verse gives a positive statement of the role envisioned for the Levites. Being “temple guards” involved more than watching the gates and internal entrances and exits. The Levites are to assist in the maintenance of all that is involved in the sanctuary’s worship activities. Like the English “divine service,”עֲבֹדָה may refer to *Gottesdienst*, to liturgical service on behalf of God, as well as any other kind of service. Here the accent is more on the latter, albeit within the temple precincts. In Numbers 4, עֲבֹדָה, “service,” was used of the heavy manual labor of setting up and dismantling the tabernacle as it was moved from camp to camp, but since the temple was not portable, in this context the term must refer to the work of servicing everything. The overall point is that, with their past lapses forgotten and forgiven, the Levites are now fully rehabilitated and recommissioned. (CC)

**44:15** *Zadok.*† Traced his Levitical lineage to Aaron through Aaron’s son Eleazar (1Ch 6:50–53). He served as priest under David, along with Abiathar (see 2Sa 8:17 and note; 15:24–29; 20:25). He supported Solomon (as opposed to Abiathar, who pledged himself to Adonijah) and thus secured for himself and his descendants the privilege of serving in the Jerusalem temple (see 1Ki 1). See note on 40:46. Later the Zadokites were removed from office, but the Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls) community remained loyal to them.

This is the first of two verses devoted to the role of the Zadokites, who alone will be priests, in contrast to all the other Levites in 44:10–14. Structurally, these two verses are formulated just as 44:10–13 were, first recollecting past behavior, and then prescribing how it will be in the future. (CC)

*who faithfully carried out.* A distinction Ezekiel did not make in his oracles of judgment (see 7:26; 22:26 and the thrust of all of ch. 8). In chs. 40–48, however, the Zadokites received special consideration because of their faithfulness. (CSB)

Of course, in the Christian church the ordination of men to be pastors is not in any way based on ancestry or ethnic origin, but instead is based on the biblical requirements for the pastoral office in passages such as 1 Timothy 2–3 and Titus 1, as well as on education and training. The church readily recognizes that pastors too are sinners as well as saints justified by grace alone. All have their faults and have made their mistakes, large and small. Nevertheless, it is proper for the church to differentiate between those shortcomings that can and should be tolerated and those sins that are proper cause for removal from the pastoral office (false doctrine, scandalous behavior, or gross malfeasance). The demotion of the non-Zadokite priests serves as a reminder for every man in the holy ministry to continue to strive to serve with complete fidelity to God’s Word, lest he forfeit his office in the church. (CC)

**44:16** *They alone are to enter.* This elevation of the Zadokites and demotion of the Levites were part of the concern for ritual purity, a major theme of chs. 40–48. Only the fittest were to serve. (CSB)

Since the preceding clause was “they alone may enter my sanctuary,” the “table” would seem more likely to refer to either of the two inner objects than to the bronze altar outside (described in 43:13–17). In any case, like the reference to Yahweh’s “food” in 44:7, the word must be taken as a figure of speech, and not literalistically. As mentioned earlier, the ritual of setting a table to aliment a deity was central in the surrounding heathen cultures, but is explicitly repudiated in the Bible. Like the sexual activity of the pagan gods and goddesses, that anthropomorphism too is inapplicable to the one true and triune God. (CC)

*my table.* Either the table that held the bread (see 41:22 and note) or the large altar on which the Lord’s food was presented (v. 7). (CSB)

Furthermore, while the Levites were restricted to the gates and courtyards, the Zadokite priests had ready access to the temple itself. Only they could function liturgically at Yahweh’s “table.” The same noun (שֻׁלְחָן) was in 41:22, where what appeared to be an altar turned out to be a “table.” As noted there, the only piece of furniture in the tabernacle or temple that was a “table” in any literal sense was that holding the bread of the Presence or shewbread. Functionally, that table within the nave or Holy Place was a counterpart to the grain offerings burned on the great altar outside in the courtyard. Yet that altar itself and its chief inner counterpart, the incense altar at the entrance to the Holy of Holies, were far more central objects in the Israelite ritual than was the table. (CC)

**44:17-31** The rest of chapter 44 contains a collection of various regulations about the conduct of the priests. We hear nothing more about the Levites. Neither are “the sons of Zadok” named again after 44:15, although these priests are the implied subjects of the verbs (which in Hebrew lack explicit subjects) until 44:21. This makes for a smooth transition from the earlier part of the chapter to the present one. Most of the rules are identical with those of the Mosaic Torah, although some tightening is in evidence. (CC)

**44:17** *linen.* Cooler than wool (see v. 18). (CSB)

פִּשְׁתִּים is virtually always found in the plural (of a presumed singular פֵּשֶׁת) and can refer to flax, but usually to linen cloth made from flax. (In 40:3 it was used of a cord or rope.) In his earlier vision of the Jerusalem temple, Ezekiel had seen a scribe wearing priestly garb, “dressed in linen,” using בַּרִּים, the plural of בַּד, the term for ordinary linen (9:2–3, 11; 10:2, 6–7). He had also used שֵׁשׁ (e.g., 16:10; 27:7) and בּוּץ (27:16) for fine luxury linen. The first two synonyms were also used in Pentateuchal parallels for priestly garments: בַּד in, for example, Ex 28:42; Lev 6:3; 16:4, and שֵׁשׁ in, for example, Ex 28:6, 8, 39. Probably there is no significance in the choice of פִּשְׁתִּים here versus another synonym. Yahweh does, however, underscore the importance of “linen” by stating the antithesis: “no wool [צֶמֶר] should be on them.” (CC)

**44:18** *turbans.* Ezekiel wore one (24:17). (CSB)

The reason Ezekiel gives for the preference for linen is לֹ֥א יַחְגְּר֖וּ בַּיָּֽזַע, literally, “and they will not gird themselves in sweat,” that is, in heavy material like wool, which induces sweat. The noun יֶזַע (in pause, יָֽזַע) is a hapax, but is obviously related to another hapax, זֵעָה, “sweat,” in Gen 3:19, and there is no doubt about its meaning. An Akkadian cognate is also known. Ezekiel does not specify the reason for avoiding “sweat,” but as most commentators suggest, like other human excretions (see Leviticus 15; Deut 23:12–14), sweat may have been considered to produce uncleanness, which would suggest spiritual uncleanness as well. The resulting disagreeable body odor would readily reinforce that impression. Also, since part of the curse due to man’s fall into sin is that he must toil with “sweat” (Gen 3:19), the absence of “sweat” here points toward the removal of the curse, the restoration of man to his original state of righteousness before God, which is the divine purpose of OT and NT worship, in which the priest or pastor serves as mediator between God and the congregation. Compare also the eschatological promises in Ps 121:6 and Rev 21:23. (CC)

**44:19** *take off the clothes.* In the interest of ritual purity. (CSB)

In OT liturgical theology, holiness is “contagious” in that it is transmitted by God through his means of grace and can be acquired through contact with “most holy” things. Our tendency to limit holiness to ethics makes such theology difficult to understand, but the biblical concept of holiness has a dynamic to it. It could be compared to an electric current that is lethal if it comes in contact with people who are not already “charged” with it. The classical examples are of those who improperly touched or even looked at the ark of the covenant: the seventy men of Beth-shemesh in 1 Sam 6:19 and Uzzah in 2 Sam 6:6–9. Apparently, Yahweh here is tightening the Mosaic Law. While the Torah prohibited lay contact with the sanctuary and its contents in general (Num 4:15), it did not explicitly prohibit lay contact with the sacerdotal vestments. (CC)

**44:20** *must not shave their heads.* Because it was a mourning ritual (7:18) that rendered the mourner unclean (see Lev 21:1–5). (CSB)

*or let their hair grow long.* Because it implied the taking of a vow that might prevent the priest from serving (see Nu 6:5; Ac 21:23–26). (CSB)

Both extremes of hair “styles” are to be avoided. The Piel of גָּלַח means “to shave.” The opposite is denoted by the idiom of the Piel verb שִׁלֵּח, “let loose,” with the object פֶּרַע, “loose, uncut hair.” The clause כָּס֥וֹם יִכְסְמ֖וּ is the Qal infinitive absolute and imperfect of the verb כָּסַם, which occurs only here in the OT, but in the context must mean “trim, clip” hair. Its direct object, אֶת־רָאשֵׁיהֶֽם, is only “their heads,” but “the hair of” is implied and must be supplied in English. (CC)

These commands are not new. In fact, the Torah parallels are more extensive. Yahweh may take for granted that the priests should observe the additional Torah commands regarding hair, or, perchance, the improper conduct he does not mention here had fallen into desuetude and no longer needed to be prohibited. The prohibition against shaving the head (or part of it) is legislated in Lev 21:5, which adds proscriptions of shaving the edges of the beard or “cutting of the flesh.” Prohibitions of uncut hair appear in connection with mourning: Lev 10:6 (death of Nadab and Abihu); 21:10. Making oneself bald is mentioned in Ezek 7:18 and 27:31 as a sign of mourning (also in Jer 16:6; Micah 1:16). When Ezekiel’s wife died, he was commanded to keep his turban on, that is, not let his hair hang loose (24:17; see also 24:23). (CC)

The frequent connection of these behaviors with mourning makes it likely that these were not only private customs, but were connected with pagan cults of the dead. Furthermore, some contexts indicate that they were signs of disfigurement (see Lev 19:27–28; 21:5), and Block properly asks, “If the sacrificial animals were to be without defect or blemish, how much more those functionaries who stand before the holy God in service?” (CC)

**44:21** This injunction is a reformulation of Lev 10:9. The reason is not hard to find—not teetotalism, which is nowhere a biblical rule (except in special, isolated instances), but simply loss of the full, rational use of one’s faculties, for some people after imbibing only small amounts of liquor. I have translated לֹֽא־יִשְׁתּ֖וּ כָּל־כֹּהֵ֑ן בְּבוֹאָ֖ם, literally, “they shall not drink, every priest, when they enter,” as “no priest is to drink … when he enters.” (CC)

**44:22** Ezekiel’s formulation is again slightly briefer than its Torah antecedents. Both in Leviticus and in Ezekiel, God’s concern about priests’ spouses is based on concern with the spheres of holiness in which the priests work and exist. God’s design is for marriage to be lifelong and to display the mutual love between Yahweh and Israel (Song of Songs), and between Christ and his church (Eph 5:21–33). (CC)

Lev 21:7 prohibits priests from marrying a prostitute, a defiled woman, or a divorced woman, and the reason is because “he [the priest] is holy to his God.” Ezekiel says nothing about prostitutes, perhaps because such a marriage would so obviously be wrong (but cf. Hosea 1–2), or perhaps because in his eschatological vision there would be no prostitutes among God’s repentant and restored people (cf. Rev 21:27; 22:15). Divorce is the result of sin on the part of one or both of the spouses and involves a violation of the holy estate of marriage (Mt 5:31–32; 19:3–12; 1 Cor 7:10–16). (CC)

Lev 21:14–15 has slightly stricter prohibitions for the high priest. In addition to the prohibitions for all priests from marrying a divorced woman, defiled woman, or prostitute, it prohibits the high priest from marrying a widow and mandates that he must marry an Israelite virgin. God’s reason is that “I am Yahweh, who sanctifies him.” Ezekiel 40–48 says nothing about a high priest, but to some extent “the Prince” fulfills his role (see on 44:3). In Ezekiel the Levitical prohibition against the high priest marrying a widow is applied to all priests, probably because death is an unclean intrusion into the realm of the holy (cf. Lev 21:1–4; 11; but see also 1 Cor 7:8–9, 39–40). However, in Ezekiel, Yahweh makes an exception in the case of the widow of a priest. She had already been connected with the priestly sphere through her deceased husband. Compare Lev 22:13, which speaks about the widowed daughter of a priest. (CC)

**44:23-24** These verses shift from prohibitions to positive commands on public duties of the priests. Formally, they differ from the context because Yahweh speaks in the first person in them and refers to the audience as “my people.” (CC)

**44:23** *difference between the holy and the common.* One of Ezekiel’s central concerns. The important task of declaring God’s will on matters of clean and unclean food, the fitness of sacrificial animals and ritual purity either had been done for pay (see Mic 3:11) or had been neglected altogether (see Jer 2:8; Eze 22:26). See Hag 2:10–13 for a positive example. (CSB)

This verse is loosely based on Lev 10:10–11. OT priests had the responsibility to teach God’s Word to the people, and this is no less true for the office of pastor established in the NT. (CC)

The first verb, יוֹר֔וּ (Hiphil imperfect of יָרָה), “teach,” is related to the noun תּוֹרָה, *torah*. The second verb, יוֹדִעֻֽם (Hiphil imperfect of יָדַע with datival suffix), literally, “they will make known to them,” is related to the noun רַּעַת, “knowledge,” which, however, never occurs in Ezekiel. (CC)

“The holy and the common” (sacred versus profane) is a merism that is shorthand for a theological system of classification, while “the unclean” versus “the clean” is a more anthropological system. “Holy” implies nearness to the presence of God and his sanctifying power. “The common” stands at some distance from God, but is still good. “Clean” refers to the proper, healthy condition of life as intended by God for his creation, whereas “unclean” implies some loss of life or health, some disruption in God’s creation caused by the intrusion of evil. The entire worship system instituted in the OT was designed not simply to distinguish between these categories, but to provide sanctification and cleansing for the people, to save them from sin and all its evil effects, and to bring them into communion with their saving God. That divine purpose has now been fulfilled through the incarnation, holy life, atoning death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who sanctifies and cleanses his church through his Word and Sacraments (see, e.g., Eph 5:26). (CC)

**44:24** *priests are to serve as judges.* One of their functions from earliest days (see NIV text note on 1Sa 4:18; see also 2Ch 19:8–11). (CSB)

Instead of “dispute,” רִיב might be rendered “lawsuit,” but of course the OT had quite a different system of jurisprudence than the modern West. Formal legal action appears to be the subject here. The “dispute” (רִיב) is the referent of the suffix on the verb יִשְׁפְּט֑וּהוּ (Kethib: וּשָׁפְטֻהוּ), “render judgment about it.” (CC)

The idiom יַעַמְד֣וּ לְמִשְׁפָּ֔ט is, literally, “they shall stand for judgment” (cf. מִשְׁפָּט and רִיב in 2 Chr 19:8). The Kethibלִשְׁפֹּט , “stand *to judge*,” is supported by the LXX Syriac, and Targum. “Stand” may reflect the later OT practice (due to Babylonian influence?) of the judge standing. The earlier practice was for the litigants to stand while the judge sat (Ex 18:13; see also Num 35:12). However, “stand” may simply be an idiom for “officiate” and imply nothing about the judge’s posture. This may be supported by the use of the Hiphil of עָמַד in 2 Chr 19:8 for “appointing” priests and Levites to be judges (cf. also 2 Chr 19:5). (CC)

בְּמִשְׁפָּטַ֖י יִשְׁפְּט֑וּהוּ, “according to my judgments they shall render judgment about it,” is one of those rare instances where the common Hebrew use of a verb and cognate noun as object can be idiomatically reproduced in English. The בְּ indicates the standard or principle “according to” which justice is determined. (CC)

The role of the priests in jurisprudence is very evident in early Israel (see Deut 17:8–13; 21:1–9). It may have waned or been suppressed under the monarchy (cf. Jehoshaphat in 2 Chr 19:4–11), but when kings ruled no more, the priests would naturally come to the fore again. Ezekiel probably experienced this personally in the exilic community, and after the return, the short-lived diarchy of high priest and king (Joshua and Zerubbabel) soon dissolved into an active priesthood alone. (CC)

Finally, they must set a good example in behavior. Ezekiel mentions only liturgical contexts, but in the OT, theology and ethics were bound up with them. I have avoided “laws” as a translation of תּוֹרוֹת in favor of its etymological “instructions.” In a theocracy, an aspect of “Law” would inevitably be entailed, but the “Gospel” aspect underlying these practices should be emphasized. (CC)

“Like people, like priest” (Hos 4:9). The experience of the church too has been that laxity, indifference, and even rank heresy starts at the top. Or whenever it starts, if it is not dealt with at that level, it will slowly but surely metastasize and spread throughout the whole body (1 Cor 5:6–7; Gal 5:9). (CC)

**44:25-27** Ezek 44:25–27 concerns itself with priestly deportment around the dead. Since the triune God is the “Lord and giver of *life*” (confessed about the Spirit in the Third Article of the Nicene Creed), as exemplified in 37:1–14, death is intrinsically something antithetical to him, something unclean. (CC)

Nevertheless, Jesus had contact with the dead in order to raise them (e.g., Lk 7:11–15), and he himself died and was buried before rising on Easter. In that way he has hallowed the graves of all who die in faith. This is expressed in a traditional graveside prayer:

Almighty God, by the death of Your Son Jesus Christ You destroyed death, by His rest in the tomb You sanctified the graves of Your saints, and by His bodily resurrection You brought life and immortality to light so that all who die in Him abide in peace and hope. (CC)

In light of the ministry and resurrection of Christ, Christians have tended to attenuate the OT rules about death into mere reminders that universal mortality is “the wages of sin” (Rom 6:23). Pastors, of course, are called not to avoid the dead, but to minister to the dying and to grieving families, perform funerals, and commemorate the departed saints. The church properly observes many customs about the burial of the dead out of respect for the sanctity of the body—which had been created by God and received Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of Christ’s body and blood—and to express the belief in the biblical doctrine of the bodily resurrection on the Last Day. In contrast, those with no hope in Christ for the resurrection of the body often treat it with disdain and may forego burial for cremation. The scriptural precedent in both Testaments favors burial, and while Scripture does not forbid cremation, that practice historically has been associated with religions that deny the resurrection of the body. The neo-paganistic assertion that “death is a part of life” is hard to distinguish from the ancient, circular “myth of the eternal return” as still found in the Hindu religion. (CC)

**44:25** *dead person.* Contact with the dead made a person ceremonially unclean (Lev 21:1–3; Hag 2:13). (CSB)

One may well ask why the priest’s wife is not mentioned. The traditional answer is that she is implied because she is nearer to him than any of the other relatives. She would have been included in the “nearest of kin,” which heads the list in Lev 21:2–3, and the rest of the list there is essentially the same as the one given here. (CC)

According to Lev 21:11, the high priest was not allowed to bury even his father or mother. However, as mentioned earlier (see on Ezek 44:3), no high priest is envisioned in Ezekiel 40–48. (CC)

**44:26** The “purification” (the noun טָהֳרָה) should last seven days according to Num 19:11–13. Here, “after his purification” (וְאַחֲרֵ֖י טָֽהֳרָת֑וֹ) seems to require an additional seven days, for a total of fourteen. That, plus the sacrifice required in 44:27, evinces again Yahweh’s intense concern for purity and holiness throughout Ezekiel 40–48. (CC)

**44:27** What Hebrews (5:3; 7:27) says about the high priest is also true of all the Zadokite priests according to this verse: because they are sinful, they are obligated to sacrifice a sin offering (here specified after contact with a dead person). But in contrast, Jesus Christ is the sinless great High Priest who has no such obligation, but offered himself as the unblemished sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (Heb 7:27). (CC)

**44:28-30** The subject of these verses is the priests’ titled property, a topic Ezekiel will develop more fully in the next chapter (45:1–4). The final verse, 44:31, is another priestly regulation. The aim of 44:28–30 is to emphasize the special status of the priests: they have Yahweh as their sole “inheritance” and “possession, property.” (Ezekiel’s vision of the land grants to other Israelites will be given in chapters 47–48.) The Hebrew wording echoes Yahweh’s promise to Aaron in Num 18:20. (CC)

To an extent, what God says here applies to NT pastors in that they receive him as their special “inheritance” by being called to serve him full time, ministering on his behalf to his people, perhaps forsaking other more lucrative professions or pursuits (cf. Mt 19:27–29). Yet from another standpoint, in the new covenant we Christians are like the OT priests in that no particular earthly territory is assigned to us. Rather, Christ is already our “promised land,” but there is more to come. Our true inheritance is not of this world, but is kept for us in heaven, to be revealed on the Last Day. Finally, it consists of a share in God’s kingdom and a place in the new heavens and new earth. (CC)

**44:28** *no possession.* The statement that priests were not to own land agrees with Nu 18:20, 23–24; Dt 10:9; Jos 13:14, 33; 18:7. (CSB)

To smooth the transition from 44:27, I (with NRSV and ESV) have supplied “this.” The Hebrew simply begins with the feminine verb וְהָיְתָ֤ה without a subject. We might assume that one of the feminine nouns later in the verse, either נַחֲלָה, “inheritance,” or אֲחֻזָּה, “possession, property,” is already implied as subject. Alternatively, since in Hebrew feminine forms can serve as abstracts, the entire topic being introduced could be the subject: “It will be for their inheritance [that] I am …” (cf. NKJV) In any event, the meaning of the verse is clear. (CC)

**44:29** The OT describes the sacrifices as the priests’ sustenance and due (e.g., Deut 18:1; Josh 13:14), what we might call their “salary.” In this context where Yahweh is speaking, the words carry more profound connotations because, after all, the sacrifices were gifts or offerings to Yahweh himself. In effect, then, Yahweh is inviting the priests to share in his own “food” (44:7). (CC)

The three types of offerings named here appeared together previously in 42:13, following Num 18:9. After listing the three, Hebrew uses a repetitious resumptive pronominal suffix on the verb יֹֽאכְל֑וּם, “they will eat them.” Two main types of sacrifice prescribed in Leviticus are not mentioned here: (1) the עוֹלָה, “burnt offering,” where everything was consumed by the altar fire, and nothing was left for human consumption; and (2) the שְׁלָמִים, “peace offerings/communion sacrifices” (see on 43:27; 45:15). (CC)

A fourth item available to priests is חֵרֶם, “every devoted thing.” This is the only instance of the word in Ezekiel. We have nothing comparable in our culture. The word appears especially in military contexts. In “Yahweh’s war” waged by Israel in the OT, most things captured, whether animate or inanimate, were “devoted” to Yahweh, that is, either killed or contributed to the sanctuary. The classical example of violation of that sanction and its punishment is the account in Joshua 7 about Achan after the capture of Jericho. (CC)

Thus חֵרֶם has a sort of double significance, both “accursed” (by association with the conquered pagans) and “consecrated” to God. The first meaning, implying destruction, is mandated in Lev 27:28–29. The second meaning, which alone would apply here, is spelled out in Num 18:14. Ezekiel does not go into detail about the source of חֵרֶם, but in addition to war (cf. Ezekiel 38–39), a second possible source would be vows, whether things were devoted together with an initial petition to God or given in the thanksgiving for God’s answer to prayer. References in the Psalms indicate that vows were often accompanied by sacrifice (e.g., Pss 66:13; 76:11). (Archaeological excavations of pagan sanctuaries often turn up votive offerings of various sorts, often little images of the deity petitioned or sometimes representations of bodily limbs presumed healed by such intercessions.) Various regulations about vows are found throughout Leviticus and Numbers, and things “devoted” to the sanctuary presumably became part of the priestly emolument. However, if vows were made carelessly, they could become a “curse,” classically illustrated in the tragic case of Jephthah’s daughter (Judg 11:29–40). (CC)

The LXX generally translated חֵרֶם as ἀνάθεμα (“anathema”), whence it passed into NT usage, where it usually is translated “accursed.” Only once in the NT is the word used positively: the older classical Greek spelling, ἀνάθημα, in Lk 21:5 refers to “devoted (objects)” adorning the temple. In the early church through the Reformation era (as Lutherans recall from the Council of Trent), “anathema” was used for excommunication. (CC)

**44:30** This verse specifies three categories of offerings that belong to the priests. The first is all kinds of firstfruits. Theologically, the OT laws about firstfruits express the idea that all earthly gifts came from God and in a sense still belonged to him, and so he should receive the first portion or “helping” of the produce. Similar to the usage here, רֵאשִׁית, “first,” is used in a construct chain with בִּכּוּרִים, “firstfruits,” in the Torah (Ex 23:19; 34:26). Some argue that instead of the redundant “first of the firstfruits,” in these contexts, רֵאשִׁית means “best” of the firstfruits. Others suggest that רֵאשִׁית means “first-processed” and בִּכּוּרִים means “first-ripened” because of its frequent application to fruit. רֵאשִׁית can be used with other, more specific words for produce in laws about the firstfruits (e.g., Num 15:20–21; 18:12; Deut 26:2, 10), which were to be given to the priests (Deut 18:4). The third category of offering in this verse is a specific kind of firstfruits. (CC)

A second, more general category of offering that belongs to the priests is denoted by תְּרוּמָה. Only a very general word such as “contribution” seems to cover all its uses. Etymologically, it might describe something that the priest would “lift up” (רוּם), and so its traditional translation is “heave offering,” although some argue that the etymology should be related to the Hiphil of רוּם in the sense that the worshiper “reserves, dedicates” (as the Hiphil of רוּם means in 45:1, 13; 48:8–9, 20, where it is used with תְּרוּמָה as its cognate accusative) the offering to God. Different parts of an animal and a variety of other items (money, bread, produce, spoils of war) are called a תְּרוּמָה in various contexts. (CC)

While רֵאשִׁית֩ and תְּרוּמָה are feminine nouns and בִּכּ֨וּרֵי is masculine plural (in construct), the following verb יִֽהְיֶ֑ה is masculine singular, apparently under the influence of the repeated key word כֹּל, “all, every.” (CC)

The third kind of offering, וְרֵאשִׁ֤ית עֲרִסֽוֹתֵיכֶם֙, translated “the first of your ground meal,” clearly is a specific kind of firstfruits. However, the meaning of עֲרִיסָה is obscure. It occurs elsewhere only in Num 15:20–21 and Neh 10:37, where too רֵאשִׁית is in construct with it and it designates a gift for the Lord and the priests. (Here the singular לַכֹּהֵ֔ן, “to the priest,” probably is used only for variety.) In Num 15:20–21, the LXX rendered it “dough,” followed by KJV but NKJV prefers “ground meal,” which I have adopted here. Those alternatives appear to be about equally divided among the lexicons, commentaries, and translations. (CC)

The final result clause, לְהָנִ֥יחַ בְּרָכָ֖ה אֶל־בֵּיתֶֽךָ, is, literally, “to cause to rest a blessing on your house.”לְהָנִ֥יחַ (the infinitive construct of the first Hiphil conjugation of נוּחַ) apparently has no subject, and its direct object is בְּרָכָ֖ה. English requires translating “blessing” as the subject of the intransitive “rest”: “to cause a blessing to rest on your house.” God’s blessing would follow from obedience to God’s will, specifically here in providing adequately for his priests. Alternatively, as the KJV suggests, the preceding כֹּהֵן, “priest,” may be the subject of the infinitive: “so that the priest causes a blessing to rest on your house.” This understanding of the promise may be supported by the fact that only priests had the privilege of pronouncing the Aaronic Benediction (Num 6:22–27) upon the congregation. If so, the promise is a reminder of the efficacy of the holy ministry: through the spoken Word of God, God does indeed confer the blessings of which he speaks. (CC)

In either case, the theology and sacrificial language are reflected in the NT: “Do not forget doing good and sharing, for God is pleased with such sacrifices” (Heb 13:16). In particular, the NT exhorts God’s people to provide for their faithful clergy based on the OT precedent: “Do you not know that those who work in the temple precincts eat from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the altar [that is, in the sacrificial offerings]?” (1 Cor 9:13; see also Rom 15:27; Gal 6:6; 2 Tim 2:6). (CC)

**44:31** *found dead.* This restriction applied to all Israel according to Lev 7:24. (CSB)

Basically the same prohibition applied to the priests here was a rule for all Israelites as part of God’s desire that they be “holy people” (Ex 22:3, with טְרֵפָה, “torn by wild animals”). In Lev 22:8 the same proscription as here (with both words: נְבֵלָה וּטְרֵפָה) appears among the specific rules for priests, which is a precedent for its application here. Contextually, it provides a stark, concluding contrast between food only fit for scavenging animals and the choice rations Yahweh wills for his priests. (CC)