

EZEKIEL

Chapter 44

The Gate for the Prince

Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east. And it was shut. 2 And the LORD said to me, “This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it. Therefore it shall remain shut. 3 Only the prince may sit in it to eat bread before the LORD. He shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out by the same way.” 4 Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple, and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD. And I fell on my face. 5 And the LORD said to me, “Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I shall tell you concerning all the statutes of the temple of the LORD and all its laws. And mark well the entrance to the temple and all the exits from the sanctuary. 6 And say to the rebellious house, to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: O house of Israel, enough of all your abominations, 7 in admitting foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, to be in my sanctuary, profaning my temple, when you offer to me my food, the fat and the blood. You have broken my covenant, in addition to all your abominations. 8 And you have not kept charge of my holy things, but you have set others to keep my charge for you in my sanctuary. 9 “Thus says the Lord GOD: No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary. 10 But the Levites who went far from me, going astray from me after their idols when Israel went astray, shall bear their punishment. 11 They shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the temple and ministering in the temple. They shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before the people, to minister to them. 12 Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn concerning them, declares the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their punishment. 13 They shall not come near to me, to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my holy things and the things that are most holy, but they shall bear their shame and the abominations that they have committed. 14 Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the temple, to do all its service and all that is to be done in it.

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)

44:2 *the gates shall remain shut.*† 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)

Ordinance signified that only God Himself can open the way that leads to communion with Him. When rebellious sons and daughters of Adam arrogate to themselves the right to come into His presence, they insult and profane “the glory of the LORD” which “filled the temple” (v 4). (TLSB)

44:3 *prince*. This individual had an unusual but significant relationship to the restored community. He did not, in the first place, exercise royal functions of a civic or political nature. His main responsibility lay rather in promoting worship. Though not granted priestly status and the authority to offer sacrifices, he nevertheless personified the privilege of a reconciled people to commune with God as well as the obligation to bring Him continual sacrifices in an orderly, sanctified way. In this person, unique among the functionaries of the old covenant, we see embodied everything the spiritual Israel of the new covenant may and should do to praise, extol, and glorify God for redemption from Satan's dominion and from the curse of sin. Just: "He is the chosen Priest and eternal King, the Christ, inasmuch as He is the Son of God" (ANF 1:258). (TLSB)

to eat. Probably his part of the fellowship offering. 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 vestibule. From the inside of the outer court. (CSB)

44:4–8 The kind of worship acceptable to the reconciled Lord continues to be defined in the forms and regulations prescribed in the old covenant. (TLSB)

44:6–8 *foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh*. To be excluded from the sanctuary in Jerusalem. In a similar way, only those who repent, believe, and amend their lives are members of the communion of saints; thus they may appear before God's throne. (TLSB)

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

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)

The Lord underscores the holy awe by which reconciled sinners are to regard the privilege of worship. The priests who earlier ministered to idols were permitted only to engage in menial tasks (vv 9–14). They retained the title as priests but could not fulfill the duties as priests. (TLSB)

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)

far from Me. On idol worship in Israel's past, see the reforms that King Josiah carried out (2Ki 23:4). Those assuming leadership in such abominations "became a stumbling block" (v 12). (TLSB)

44:11–14 The Lord reclassifies descendants of Aaron who are not descendants of Zadok. The non-Zadokites are given responsibilities like those of Levites, though they retain their title as priests. Cf vv 15–31. (TLSB)

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

44:1–14 Detestable practices in the past drove God from His dwelling place, so God institutes regulations preventing those who are “uncircumcised in heart and flesh” from entering His sanctuary (v 9). Today, God’s Holy Law guides your relationship with Him and with others. Unfortunately, you cannot keep His Law rightly. Yet, Christ kept them for you. He kept God’s Laws perfectly in your stead and for your consecration. Through Christ, you are appointed to a holy priesthood (1Pt 2:5). • Father, I daily sin much and do not deserve Your mercy. Grant me daily repentance and renew me through Christ, my Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

Rules for Levitical Priests

15 “But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, shall come near to me to minister to me. And they shall stand before me to offer me the fat and the blood, declares the Lord GOD. 16 They shall enter my sanctuary, and they shall approach my table, to minister to me, and they shall keep my charge. 17 When they enter the gates of the inner court, they shall wear linen garments. They shall have nothing of wool on them, while they minister at the gates of the inner court, and within. 18 They shall have linen turbans on their heads, and linen undergarments around their waists. They shall not bind themselves with anything that causes sweat. 19 And when they go out into the outer court to the people, they shall put off the garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers. And they shall put on other garments, lest they transmit holiness to the people with their garments. 20 They shall not shave their heads or let their locks grow long; they shall surely trim the hair of their heads. 21 No priest shall drink wine when he enters the inner court. 22 They shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman, but only virgins of the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest. 23 They shall 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 a dispute, they shall act as judges, and they shall judge it according to my judgments. They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my appointed feasts, and they shall keep my Sabbaths holy. 25 They shall not defile themselves by going near to a dead person. However, for father or mother, for son or daughter, for brother or unmarried sister they may defile themselves. 26 After he has become clean, they shall count seven days for him. 27 And on the day that he goes into the Holy Place, into the inner court, to minister in the Holy Place, he shall offer his sin offering, declares the Lord GOD. 28 “This shall be their inheritance: I am their inheritance: and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession. 29 They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering, and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs. 30 And the first of all the firstfruits of all kinds, and every offering of all kinds from all your offerings, shall belong to the priests. You shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, that a blessing may rest on your house. 31 The priests shall not eat of anything, whether bird or beast, that has died of itself or is torn by wild animals.

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. 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). Later the Zadokites were removed from office, but the Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls) community remained loyal to them. (CSB)

kept the charge of My sanctuary. The faithful sons of Zadok (see note, 43:18–27), who perform priestly functions, must observe strict ceremonial regulations, many of which are found in the Law of Moses. (TLSB)

44:16 *They shall 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)

my table. Either the table that held the bread or the large altar on which the Lord's food was presented (v. 7). (CSB)

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

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

sweat. Priestly vestments were to be made of lightweight linen rather than of wool, which tends to make the wearer perspire. In the relatively dry, highland region of central Israel, sweat would normally evaporate quickly. Excessive sweat, like other bodily excretions, likely rendered the priests ceremonially unclean (cf Lv 15; Dt 23:12–14). Sweat may also be associated with the penalty of sin (cf Gn 3:19). (TLSB)

44:19 *put off the garments.* In the interest of ritual purity. (CSB)

transmit holiness. If the priests wore their sacred vestments among the people, it would obliterate “the difference between the holy and the common” (v 23), which they were to teach the people. People might be led to lose respect for the holy office of the priesthood. Cf Hg 2:12. (TLSB)

44:20 *shall 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 locks 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)

Judean men likely wore their hair trimmed short by a razor, though they were not to shave their heads bald, as Egyptians might. (TLSB)

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)

44:24 *they shall serve as judges.* One of their functions from earliest days. (CSB)

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

44:28 *I am their inheritance.* Ezekiel envisions worshipers who have been restored to God's favor, reconciled by a great High Priest (Heb 9:12). The redeemed need not fear coming into God's presence, because He “counts no iniquity” to them but “counts righteousness” (Ps 32:2; Rm 4:6–8). (TLSB)

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)

44:29–31 The communion of saints still lives in a fallen world. Its members succumb to temptations and lapse into unholy thoughts, words, and deeds. Therefore, Ezekiel sees them bringing a sin offering and a guilt offering, confessing their wrongs to God and pleading for forgiveness (40:39; 42:13; 46:20). Yet, everything they think, say, and do becomes “a living sacrifice” (Rm 12:1). (TLSB)

44:31 *that has died.* This restriction applied to all Israel according to Lev 7:24. (CSB)

44:15–31 God reiterates Levitical standards for His priests with some new regulations. In the NT, the Father has made Jesus our High Priest. “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). Christ has fulfilled the old order of sacrifice and permanently replaced it with a new order sealed in His blood. • Lord Jesus, Your victory at Calvary provides eternal salvation for me and all who trust in You. I give You all praise. Amen. (TLSB)