

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“In My House! Where My Priests Serve... Where My Children Pray”
44:1-31

We begin to get the order of service in the future Millennial Temple.

The very fact that there is an order of service and that the believers have certain assignments is itself instructive. You see, whenever we get together, there is to be some order in our serving the Lord and serving one another.

In the New Testament era in which we live there is great freedom in determining order of service. For example we are told regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper, or communion as we commonly call it, to celebrate it “as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup” (1Corinthians 11:26). In other words the frequency is up to us.

Some celebrate weekly; others daily. There's a freedom about it.

We can choose style of worship, time of worship, place of worship... Just about everything is open to us, so long as it honors the Lord in His holiness.

It does not follow, however, that lack of order is spiritual. There is to be order. Our services must make sense.

Before God gives Ezekiel some ideas about order of service He introduces a mysterious character.

Ezekiel 44:1 Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut.

Ezekiel 44:2 And the Lord said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.

Ezekiel 44:3 As for the prince, because he is the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way."

Once the Lord returns to the Temple through the east gate it will be sealed. There is a popular idea that the current east gate in Jerusalem, also called the Golden Gate, is the gate described by Ezekiel. It isn't. For one thing the dimensions of it are different. More importantly we've seen from our studies that the Millennial Temple will not be in the exact spot the current Temple Mount occupies.

Who is this prince? *Let's see first who it isn't!* It isn't the Lord for the following reasons:

1. In verse three it says that he "eats bread before the Lord." The phrasing clearly distinguishes him from the Lord.
2. In chapter forty-five we learn that this prince makes sin offerings for himself as well as the people. There's no way the Lord would offer a sacrifice for Himself!
3. In chapter forty-six we learn the prince has children.
4. In Ezekiel 48:22 we are told that this prince shall have a land allotment along with the Tribes of Israel.

Who is it? *I say it's David!* Consider the following verses:

Hosea 3:5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

Jeremiah 30:9 But they shall serve the Lord their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them.

Ezekiel 34:23 I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them - My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

Ezekiel 37:24 "David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them.
Ezekiel 37:25 Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.

Thus it would seem that David will serve as a co-regent, a “prince,” in the administration of the Messiah.

Before Ezekiel begins to describe the service of the priests he is given an exhortation to deliver to his listeners in verses four through eight.

Ezekiel 44:4 Also He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple; so I looked, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord; and I fell on my face.

Ezekiel 44:5 And the Lord said to me, "Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes and hear with your ears, all that I say to you concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Lord and all its laws. Mark well who may enter the house and all who go out from the sanctuary.

Ezekiel 44:6 "Now say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "O house of Israel, let Us have no more of all your abominations.

Ezekiel 44:7 When you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to defile it - My house - and when you offered My food, the fat and the blood, then they broke My covenant because of all your abominations.

Ezekiel 44:8 And you have not kept charge of My holy things, but you have set others to keep charge of My sanctuary for you."

There a line in *Godfather 2* that has found it's way into pop-culture. Michael Corleone is incensed that a rival has broken the gangster code by attacking him in his own home. He exclaims, "IN MY HOME! IN MY BEDROOM! Where my wife sleeps... and my children play with their toys."

Look at verse seven again where the Lord exclaims, "When you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to defile it - My house..."

Today **we** are the 'house' of the Lord, both in our individual bodies and our corporate body when we gather. What are we... What am I... bringing in to the house of the Lord? It's an important question especially in this age of grace when we keep moving old boundaries farther and farther.

Ezekiel 44:9 Thus says the Lord God: "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel.

In case we were still wondering this verse puts us on notice that men will still be sinners needing salvation in the Millennium. The heart of the problem, as Billy Graham used to say, is the problem of the heart.

It's kind of mind-blowing, isn't it, that Jesus Christ could be on the earth in His resurrected body and people still will reject His offer of salvation?

Verse nine forms a segue to verses ten through fourteen as we learn that God will restrict the duties of certain priests in the Millennial Temple.

Ezekiel 44:10 "And the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who strayed away from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity.

Ezekiel 44:11 Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, as gatekeepers of the house and ministers of the house; they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them.

Ezekiel 44:12 Because they ministered to them before their idols and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity, therefore I have raised My hand in an oath against them," says the Lord God, "that they shall bear their iniquity.

Ezekiel 44:13 And they shall not come near Me to minister to Me as priest, nor come near any of My holy things, nor into the Most Holy Place; but they shall bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed.

Ezekiel 44:14 Nevertheless I will make them keep charge of the temple, for all its work, and for all that has to be done in it.

We'll see in a moment that only Levites descended from Zadok will be allowed to offer the sacrifices. The Levites from the other families did not remain faithful but led the people into sin.

I think this has application to every New Testament believer in this sense: We are to do everything in our power to not offend, or stumble, another

believer. Yes, we have and enjoy great liberty in Jesus Christ. But our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ supersedes our individual liberty.

In his discussion about meat sacrificed to idols, the apostle Paul said if you want to partake of a liberty that offends others, have it to yourself and to God. Go out of your way to keep it to yourself.

Don't become an evangelist for your liberty! Seriously, some believers are more vocal about questionable behaviors than they are about the Gospel. Instead of sharing Christ with nonbelievers they are sharing vices with believers.

Before we navigate away from these verses, note the precious nature of verse fourteen. God in His mercy allows these guys to serve. They may be disqualified from certain things, but not from everything.

In verses fifteen through twenty-seven we are given the overview of the ministry of the priests who descend from Zadok.

Ezekiel 44:15 "But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood," says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 44:16 "They shall enter My sanctuary, and they shall come near My table to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge.

Ezekiel 44:17 And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house.

Ezekiel 44:18 They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.

Ezekiel 44:19 When they go out to the outer court, to the outer court to the people, they shall take off their garments in which they have ministered, leave them in the holy chambers, and put on other garments; and in their holy garments they shall not sanctify the people.

Ezekiel 44:20 "They shall neither shave their heads, nor let their hair grow long, but they shall keep their hair well trimmed.

Ezekiel 44:21 No priest shall drink wine when he enters the inner court.

Ezekiel 44:22 They shall not take as wife a widow or a divorced woman, but take virgins of the descendants of the house of Israel, or widows of priests.

Ezekiel 44:23 "And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Ezekiel 44:24 In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths.

Ezekiel 44:25 "They shall not defile themselves by coming near a dead person. Only for father or mother, for son or daughter, for brother or unmarried sister may they defile themselves.

Ezekiel 44:26 After he is cleansed, they shall count seven days for him.

Ezekiel 44:27 And on the day that he goes to the sanctuary to minister in the sanctuary, he must offer his sin offering in the inner court," says the Lord God.

In the days of David and Solomon Zadok and his boys remained loyal while others did not. God promised that his descendants would be remembered in the future service of the Temple.

These priests have a high calling, a high privilege, and with it comes a higher standard. They are to be separate, different, in their clothing, in their grooming, in their marriages, and in their drinking alcohol, among other things.

It isn't that those practices make you more holy or more spiritual. No, they communicate to others that you understand your high calling, your high privilege, to serve the Lord.

We often get this wrong in the church. We think that the restrictions will cause us to be better Christians. We shake our heads at monks, knowing that cloistering themselves away will not eliminate the desires of the flesh. Then we adopt our own diet or dress, our own grooming and other habits, and think ourselves more spiritual. It doesn't work that way.

Having said that, it is still a high calling, a high privilege, to serve the Lord. And not just as a minister or a missionary. Here is what I mean. In the New Testament there are standards for men who desire to serve the Lord as pastors and elders and deacons. But those standards are really applicable to any Christian man who wants to serve the Lord anywhere in the church or in the world!

Read those passages in the pastoral epistles and you'll see that every characteristic is something every Christian man ought to have.

Let me put it this way because I think some of you will relate to my experience. Growing-up in the Roman Catholic tradition I understood that priests and nuns were super-saintly men and women who lived to serve God. Everyone else was so obviously less spiritual that there were only a few basic standards to adhere to: Don't kill anyone, don't commit adultery, etc. (Of course over time those have gotten relaxed!).

Almost imperceptibly I think that protestants have this same idea. We think there is a huge gap between the minister, the missionary and the 'normal' believer. They need to have certain standards but I don't!

A minister (a pastor let's call him) is a Christian with certain gifts. So is a missionary. **Everyone who is not a minister or a missionary is a Christian with certain gifts!** Where is the gap? It's only in our way of thinking, which often leads us to relax our standards.

The Millennial priests won't be drinking wine. As much as I want to, I'm not going to get into a discussion about drinking tonight. It's OK to drink, never OK to be drunk. No one has been able to tell me exactly where drinking becomes drunkenness.

Personally I consider alcohol a great evil. Enough said.

The chapter closes with information about the portion for these priests.

Ezekiel 44:28 "It shall be, in regard to their inheritance, that I am their inheritance. You shall give them no possession in Israel, for I am their possession.

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

Ezekiel 44:30 The best of all firstfruits of any kind, and every sacrifice of any kind from all your sacrifices, shall be the priest's; also you shall give to the priest the first of your ground meal, to cause a blessing to rest on your house.

Ezekiel 44:31 The priests shall not eat anything, bird or beast, that died naturally or was torn by wild beasts.

No road kill for the priests! The emphasis isn't on the priests, however. It's on the offerer. I think what is indicated is that when the Israelite thinks of bringing an offering, he or she should always bring the first, the best - **not road kill!**

Over the years I've seen a lot of 'road kill' given in the name of Jesus. It's one thing to donate some broken down appliance to charity when everyone knows full well that it is really junk. It's another thing to give something as if it were a real prized possession when, in fact, it's really junk.

Giving God our best doesn't mean we dress up in our 'Sunday best' for church. It's a heart issue. It's the desire of our heart to give God the first, the best of our treasure, of our time, and of our talent, because we love Him.

A few summary thoughts as we close. Serving the Lord is a high calling and a high privilege for every believer and we are to serve Him in an orderly way and offer Him the first and the best of our treasure, talent and time.

