

## Ezekiel Chapters 43 and 44 - John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson the "The Holiness of God". The term "Holiness" is about separating oneself for God. The idea includes the concept that if one chooses to live for God, we do so on His terms, not ours. It means we are obedient to His desires for our life and there are no compromises.
  - a) A simple analogy to use might be two cups of water. One has been purified and can be drunk as it contains no "problems". The other cup of water came straight from the ocean and cannot be drunk without getting sick. Can one make the dirty water clean by mixing it with the good water? No. That's sort of the idea of "Holiness". It is about separating the "bad" from the "good" as the "good" cannot make the "bad" any better.
  - b) This leads us to Ezekiel. The big picture of the recent chapters of Ezekiel is that God, based on His grace alone will forgive the Israelites for their idolatry. One day, God will rule over that nation, not because they deserve it, but because He promised to do so. Even under God's grace, Israel must learn to live under God's "Holiness".
  - c) In the same way, God allows Christians to be "perfect" before Him as we have accepted Jesus' payment for the forgiveness of our sins. That forgiveness does not give us a license to sin. If we accept Jesus payment for our sins, we then agree to submit our life to God on His terms, not ours. That too, is about God's "holiness". The idea is about being fully dedicated to God with no compromises. This does not mean we are perfect, but that we choose to live and try to live as God desires for our lives.
2. Meanwhile, we last left Ezekiel learning about a future temple to be built. Based on text in this book, (e.g. Ezekiel 36:38) this temple will exist when all of Israel will know God and serve Him.
  - a) While the last lesson focused on measurements details of this new temple, this lesson focuses on the purpose of that temple. It starts with God Himself entering the temple. That entrance is then closed as it was used by God Himself.
  - b) This lesson deals with what God expects of His people (Israelites) as they live under His guidance. The text here reviews (indirectly) God's laws as established in the first five books of the bible and shows how God intended those laws to be enforced and how the Israelites will live under God's rule.
  - c) The idea of Holiness applies to Christians as well. When we accept Jesus payment for our sins, this does not mean we can now go on with our lives and ignore God. To give our hearts to Jesus means that we now desire to live for God and not for our selves. To live a holy life does means we are to live to please Him in all that we do. Holiness is doing what is right based on doing "what is good" from God's perspective. The bible is our guide for understanding what is right and "good" from God's perspective.
3. In this chapter we continue to read about life "for" the Israelites during the Millennium.
  - a) It would help here if I briefly reviewed some points from the last lesson. One day there will be a "millennium" (A future 1,000-year period of time) after the "church era" is over. It is a period of time where Jesus rules the world from Jerusalem and Christians somehow rule and reign with Him. (See Revelation 20:5 on this point.)
  - b) In this millennium, Jesus rules over those who have survived the tribulation and are repopulating the world. This 1,000-year period of time fulfills a promise made by God to the Jewish people. It is that the promised Messiah (king) will rule the world from Israel.
  - c) Before Jesus was born, a promise was stated to Mary that her son would rule over the "House of Jacob". That is a title for all of Israel. (See Luke 1:32). While Jesus does rule over those who have given their heart to Him, (i.e., all Christians), there has never been a point in human history where Jesus has ruled over all of Israel. That is why bible scholars who take this prediction literally see a future 1,000-year period where Jesus rules over Israel and over the world at that time from Jerusalem.

4. The last lesson focused on measurements of this new temple. Most of the last lesson was detailed measurements of every aspect of this to-be-built temple. Now let me give some good news. The good news is we are done measuring, other than a brief "encore" appearance for a few verses. ☺
- a) This lesson focuses on how this temple is to be used. It gives examples of how the Jews in this future time era are to worship God as He always intended them to do so.
  - b) As with the last lesson, know that the final nine chapters of Ezekiel are primarily for the Jewish believer to understand their long-term future as a nation. Like all lessons of the bible, even chapters written primarily for Jews have lessons and principals for Christians.
  - c) Now that you have been briefed, I can start the text itself. ☺
5. Chapter 43, Verse 1: Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, <sup>2</sup> and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. <sup>3</sup> The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. <sup>4</sup> The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east. <sup>5</sup> Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.
- a) We last left Ezekiel being given a tour of this temple that will exist in the future. Ezekiel was somehow "magically transported" from Babylon to Israel and also transported future in time to when this temple is built. How this actually happened is unknown. It was "real enough" that (in this lesson) Ezekiel will participate in some of the worship practices.
  - b) We are now finished describing the temple, which was Chapters 40-42. Starting in this lesson, which is Chapter 43, we have God Himself having His "presence" enter the temple. Way back in Chapters 8-11 were references of God leaving the temple that was destroyed prior to the Babylonian Captivity. This means a couple of things:
    - i) First, it is "more proof" that God is not done with Israel as a nation. Here in this future temple as described by Ezekiel, God has his presence in that temple.
    - ii) This also means that the temple that was built after the Babylonian Captivity, and later remodeled by Herod (the one Jesus entered) had no biblical references to God ever entering that temple. During the life of Jesus, He made the statement that "One greater than the temple (referring to Himself) is here". (Matthew 12:6).
    - iii) Some of the same descriptive language describing God entering this temple is very similar to the language using of God leaving the old temple from previous lessons.
  - c) The text specifically mentions God coming through the east gate of this temple. If you recall from the last lesson, there were three entrances to this temple. One was from the eastern direction, another was from one was from the north and a third entrance was from the south. There is no west side entrance.
    - i) This will be significant as the East gate will be closed now that God has used it.
  - d) Notice at the end of Verse 3 that Ezekiel fell "face down". Ezekiel has now spent a good portion of his life hearing the voice of God and seeing visions by God. My point is that Ezekiel is still humbled to be in God's presence even after all he has been through.
  - e) The final point is after Ezekiel humbled himself, the Spirit of God somehow "transported" Ezekiel to inside the temple where God's presence is now located.
  - f) OK John, I get all of that. What does it mean? That is explained in Verses 6-9.
6. Verse 6: While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. <sup>7</sup> He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever. The house of Israel will never again defile my holy name--neither they nor their kings--by their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings at their high places. <sup>8</sup> When they placed their threshold next to my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them, they defiled my holy name by their detestable practices. So I destroyed them in my anger. <sup>9</sup> Now let them put away from me their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings, and I will live among them forever.

- a) Notice in Verse 6, the "man" who was Ezekiel's tour guide in the first three chapters is not the one speaking to Ezekiel in Verse 6. The text makes a point that Ezekiel heard a voice coming from inside the temple. Since the only "entities" in this temple were Ezekiel, the man (angel) who is the tour guide and God Himself, it must be God speaking.
  - b) The first thing God says in effect is "This is My throne" and "This is the place where I will live among the Israelites forever." Personally I'm fascinated by the word "forever". I thought you (that's me, John ☺) said this temple is for 1,000 years. Yet the text clearly says God will dwell here "forever". The truth is we don't know what happens to all us saved people after the 1,000 years is completed. We do live with God forever, but we have few details after that. It may be that God and this temple somehow exist forever.
    - i) This gets back to the issue of "Who builds this temple anyway?" Did God lay out every measurement so humans could build it, or does God "Himself" somehow build it so it lasts forever? Maybe that is why we don't read of the building materials used in this temple as God Himself builds the temple (speculation).
  - c) Besides all of that speculation, I effectively interrupted God who was busy explaining to Israel what is different about this temple versus previous temples.
    - i) Verse 7 says, "The house of Israel will never again defile my holy name--neither they nor their kings--by their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings".
      - a) Getting back to Ezekiel's time, one problem in the history of Israel was that many of their kings committed idolatry. That was one of the reasons that God allowed the Babylon Captivity to happen. Here God is making the point that never again will any of Israel's political leaders defy God's name or sin in God's presence.
    - ii) So what does all of this mean to Christians? The answer gets back to the title of this lesson: "The Holiness of God". Even though the blood of Jesus allows us to freely approach God the Father, this does not give us license to approach God in a "cheap" way. God still must be respected as God and the concept of "Holiness" is the idea that we separate Him from all aspects of our lives.
    - iii) Does this mean that Christians must worship God the exact same way as described in the Old Testament? No it does not. The New Testament is our guide as to how to interpret the Old Testament. In short, we are not "under the law", (see 1st Corinthians 9:21 or Galatians 5:18) but at the same time we are to live to please God in all that we do. The idea is that sin is to be avoided and God desires that every aspect of our lives be pleasing to Him. That is "Holiness".
7. Verse 10: "Son of man, describe the temple to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their sins. Let them consider the plan,<sup>11</sup> and if they are ashamed of all they have done, make known to them the design of the temple--its arrangement, its exits and entrances--its whole design and all its regulations and laws. Write these down before them so that they may be faithful to its design and follow all its regulations.
- a) In Verse 10, we get the "why question" answered as to measurement details of this new temple. In the last lesson, we had three chapters (40-42) describing every measurement detail of this temple. The question is why does God, through Ezekiel bother to give us all the details of this new temple? The "why answer" is stated in Verse 10. It says, "(So) that they (Israelites) may be ashamed of their sins".
    - i) OK, now I am more confused. ☺ How can knowing every measurement detail of this temple make the Israelites ashamed of their sins? The answer is to know that the history of Israel has been a mixture of worshipping God and worshipping idols at the same time. This new temple shows the Israelites that despite all of their past sins, God still wants to rule over their lives and a future day is coming where Israel will worship God as He desires. It shows God's willingness to forgive Israel of their sins despite the fact that they collectively turned from Him.

- ii) In this future temple, God is forgiving the Israelites based on His grace alone, and not based on the Israelites ability to worship God based on their efforts. This new temple is God showing grace on the nation of Israel despite their sins and flaws. It is God allowing the Israelites to worship Him on His terms despite their past sins.
  - iii) The application to Christians is similar. The idea is that we are saved by God's grace and not based on the good things that we do. It is not (nor ever has been) a matter of our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds. It is simply our willingness to come to God on His terms and He fully forgiving us of all our sins, past, present and future so that we can spend eternity with Him again, on His terms, not ours.
  - b) This leads us to the rest of Verses 10 and 11. Ezekiel is told to write down the details of the temple along with its regulations and laws (coming up over the next two chapters) so that the Israelites will obey God on His terms and not theirs (the Israelites). In other words, this new worship system will not allow "mixed loyalties" to other false gods.
8. Verse 12: "This is the law of the temple: All the surrounding area on top of the mountain will be most holy. Such is the law of the temple.
- a) For a lot of religious Jews, "Verse 12" is a key point. For religious Jews, the first five books of the bible, all written by Moses, are considered the "most special" and are studied far more than the rest of the Old Testament. The first five books of the bible are together are called the "Torah" which means "The Law". Here in Verse 12, we have a new title called "the law of the Temple". It doesn't just refer to Verse 12, but to the idea that all of the regulations found in this chapter and the next few chapters apply to how God is to be worshipped in this new Temple.
  - b) Let me put it another way: The last three chapters of Ezekiel (40-42) focused on how this new Temple was to be constructed. Chapters 44 and 45 focus on how the Israelites are to worship God in this new temple. Many of the laws as described in the books of Moses are re-emphasized here as part of that worship program. In other words, in this future temple, the Israelites are to worship God the way He originally intended them to do so.
  - c) So, how does this affect us Christians? Yes, we are saved for eternity. Yes, I do believe we spend a lot of eternity worshipping God and thanking Him for our salvation. Is that all we do all day? I suspect not, but I do suspect this is a big part of our eternal salvation.
    - i) The bible has very little text describing what we do for eternity. The bible is mainly a manual for how to live in the "here and now". It is as if God is saying in effect, "Let me worry about the next life" and you just focus on this one.
    - ii) Here in Ezekiel, we get sort of an exception to that rule where God describes how the Israelites are to worship Him in the future. I do believe this section is literal, but I also understand it has applications for the "here and now" as well. The idea is for the Israelites, despite the sins of idolatry, God is saying to them in effect, "I (God) still have a wonderful eternal plan for You". As long as we are breathing, it is never too late to turn to Him for one's salvation and be a part of this plan!
  - d) Meanwhile, back in Verse 12: The first "law" of this new temple is all of the surrounding area of the temple site is "holy". What that means is there is a designated area around this temple that is solely to be used for God's purposes. In practical terms for those living in the millennium, it means that other people can't build houses in this area or do things that are "not for God". We will get a more detailed description of this requirement in the next lesson.
    - i) One has to remember that people living in this millennium period of time still have "regular lives". They have to eat and work for a living. God alone will be the god of the Israelites and a designated area near the Temple will only be for the use of the business of the Temple which is the worship of God. What that area around the temple will be used for is a topic in the next lesson.

9. Verse 13: "These are the measurements of the altar in long cubits, that cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth: Its gutter is a cubit deep and a cubit wide, with a rim of one span around the edge. And this is the height of the altar: <sup>14</sup> From the gutter on the ground up to the lower ledge it is two cubits high and a cubit wide, and from the smaller ledge up to the larger ledge it is four cubits high and a cubit wide. <sup>15</sup> The altar hearth is four cubits high, and four horns project upward from the hearth. <sup>16</sup> The altar hearth is square, twelve cubits long and twelve cubits wide. <sup>17</sup> The upper ledge also is square, fourteen cubits long and fourteen cubits wide, with a rim of half a cubit and a gutter of a cubit all around. The steps of the altar face east."
- a) In Verses 13 through 17, we get an "encore appearance" of measurements. The good news, as best I can tell, is that this is the last "measurement section" left in the book.
  - b) This section is describing the main alter used for offerings in the New Temple. Know that this altar is in the center of the temple as described in the last three chapters and the last lesson of this study. Like the last lesson, I included a sketch of the details of this section at the end of the lesson to help visualize what Ezekiel is describing in this section.
  - c) Just like in previous altars described in the Old Testament, there are four horns sticking out of the four corners of the top, flat area of this altar. Animals to be sacrificed are tied to these horns. Let's face it the animals may not be too crazy about the sacrifice concept. ☺
    - i) OK, why do we return to animal sacrifices? I thought Jesus paid the price for sins once and for all and no new animal sacrifices are necessary. One has to remember that we are dealing with new generations of people who never accepted Jesus' payment for their sins. Symbolically, these sacrifices do look "back" to the cross just as the Old Testament sacrifices looked "forward" to the cross.
  - d) What is unique about this altar versus previous altars is its size. Its size is different from all previous altars in all the Temples (and the tabernacle) in Jewish history.
  - e) What is also unique is there are steps leading up to this altar. In the original tabernacle in Exodus, the concept of steps was forbidden. In the "law of this new Tabernacle" we have a change from the "Exodus law" where there are steps leading up to this altar. Why the difference? I suspect it has something to do with complete forgiveness. Just as there are steps taken for God's forgiveness, so there are steps needed to lead up to God's presence.
  - f) The text makes a point of saying the steps leading up to the altar "face east". That means the steps go downhill facing east and therefore, go uphill towards the altar facing west. Since God entered the building from the east, that ties to this fact. The idea is that as one walks up the steps to approach the altar, one is walking "towards God" and one's path to God follows the same way that God entered in the temple.
    - i) What is the point of telling me all of this? It is that God is "approachable" if we are willing to fully commit our lives to Him.
10. Verse 18: Then he said to me, "Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: These will be the regulations for sacrificing burnt offerings and sprinkling blood upon the altar when it is built: <sup>19</sup> You are to give a young bull as a sin offering to the priests, who are Levites, of the family of Zadok, who come near to minister before me, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>20</sup> You are to take some of its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar and on the four corners of the upper ledge and all around the rim, and so purify the altar and make atonement for it. <sup>21</sup> You are to take the bull for the sin offering and burn it in the designated part of the temple area outside the sanctuary.
- a) Now we begin the "regulations" for this new altar. It starts with sacrificing a bull. The ritual is similar to when the original tabernacle was first dedicated by Moses.
  - b) If one recalls in Exodus, one of the 12 tribes was singled out to serve God, which was the Levites. The tribe of Levites did not get a portion of the Promised Land like the rest of the Israelites. Instead, they were to be spread out through Israel and be God's ministers to the people. Here in the future, the "family of Zadok" was part of the Levites and it is their job to perform these ritual sacrifices at this new temple.

- i) This leads to two questions. The first is "why are these Zadok descendants in charge?" Apparently God is rewarding this family for loyalty of service when most of Israel turned from God. So are you saying their eternal reward is to serve God? No, I'm saying their descendants have the privilege of serving God as a reward for their loyalty of service from generation to generation.
    - a) Who is Zadok anyway? He was the High Priest who took over when David was king. If one has ever studied First Samuel, there was a high priest named Eli. His sons were wicked and God made an oath that Eli's family line would be cut off from being the high priest. (See 1st Samuel 2:35 on this point.) The new line of High Priests was under "Zadok". In the Millennium, that line of High Priests will continue under Zadok.
  - ii) The second question is "Why does this altar have to be "cleansed" with the blood of a bull to begin with"? Again, didn't Jesus pay the price for sins once and for all? To answer the question, during the millennium, there are going to be multitudes of Jewish people who never looked towards God's ultimate sacrifice for sins. Therefore this altar is "cleansed with blood" not for God's sake, but to prepare the Israelites to know that a blood sacrifice is necessary for the forgiveness of sins.
- c) In Verses 18-21, the word "You" is used over and over again. God is telling Ezekiel himself to perform this act of sacrificing a bull. Is God speaking "metaphorically" of a future day when the High Priest cleans the altar or is God telling Ezekiel to perform this ritual himself? Remember that Ezekiel was trained as a priest and since Ezekiel was taken into captivity, Ezekiel never got a chance to perform any duties as a priest.
- i) When we as Christians see this new temple (as we rule and reign with Jesus), we may see Ezekiel himself cleans this temple one day. Beyond that thought, I don't know if Ezekiel "symbolically" cleansed it for the future, or if we do see Ezekiel in the future perform this ritual.
- d) Meanwhile, God is describing this altar used for sacrificing animals. Why should I care and how does that affect my life? The short answer is that just because we are saved, does not mean we can now go about "our business" and ignore God. To give our lives for God is not just a one time and "forget about it" commitment. It is a lifetime commitment of serving Him. I'm not saying we have to sacrifice bulls. I'm saying that every day of our lives is a commitment to God as His blood was shed on our behalf.
11. Verse 22: "On the second day you are to offer a male goat without defect for a sin offering, and the altar is to be purified as it was purified with the bull. <sup>23</sup> When you have finished purifying it, you are to offer a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. <sup>24</sup> You are to offer them before the LORD, and the priests are to sprinkle salt on them and sacrifice them as a burnt offering to the LORD.
- a) Apparently, one bull is not enough. We have a male goat being offered as a "sin offering". In the millennium, just because all the Israelites "know God" does not mean they are free from the effects of sin and "sin offerings" are still made.
    - i) The difference between the bull offering and the goat offering is the "bull offering" is symbolic of one "dedicating their all" to God. It is similar in concept to when we first give our lives to God. Because bulls were bigger and more valuable than goats, bulls were used for this type of offering. The idea of the goat offering is about the realization of our sinfulness before God. It is roughly equivalent of the idea of confessing one's sins before God but it includes the idea that we realize we are sinful by nature and is greater in scope than just confessing one's sins.
  - b) On the second day, another bull offering is made. So why repeat this ritual? This ritual is repeated for seven days. The "short answer" is that if one repeats this ritual for seven days, the "seriousness" of that commitment sticks better. A ram is also part of the burnt offering and I'll explain why after the next set of text.

12. Verse 25: "For seven days you are to provide a male goat daily for a sin offering; you are also to provide a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. <sup>26</sup> For seven days they are to make atonement for the altar and cleanse it; thus they will dedicate it. <sup>27</sup> At the end of these days, from the eighth day on, the priests are to present your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar. Then I will accept you, declares the Sovereign LORD."
- a) For the first seven days of this altar, it is to be "ritually cleansed" by offering a male goat as a sin offering and a bull and a ram every day as a burnt offering. After the seven days are over, then the altar may be used to accept people's offerings as they approach God.
    - i) Let me explain what the "ram" is for. When Abraham offered Isaac, God provided a ram as a substitute. It speaks of Jesus being offered as a substitute for our sins.
  - b) Back to the question of: "If this altar was given by God, why does this ritual have to be repeated for seven days"? The idea of the number "seven" refers to God's completeness. It is not that the altar was "spiritually dirty" and required all of these offerings in order to make it clean! The idea is that "imperfect people" were approaching God for the forgiveness of sins and those people who are doing the offerings need to understand they are approaching a "Holy God" with their lives. Therefore, they needed to make offerings to show their commitment and to understand their own sins were forgiven.
    - i) How does this apply to us? If we are going to be used of God for service to others, then we too, need to realize that we are forgiven and offer ourselves to God so that we can be used for His service. That is a New Testament principal as taught in Romans Chapter 12, Verse 1. This does not mean we have to offer seven bulls and seven male goats every week. ☺ It does mean we are to be fully committed to God so that we can be of service to Him. We are back to the idea of "Holiness" before God.
  - c) In the bible the number "eight" represents a new beginning. Just as the number "seven" represents the "completeness" of God, "eight" is a new beginning. That is why these offerings are made for seven days and on the eighth day these priests can now be of service to others making a sacrifice.
13. Chapter 44, Verse 1: Then the man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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."
- a) Ezekiel was once again "transported" to a new location. Ezekiel was still inside the temple, but now he has moved from the altar to just inside the east gate. If you recall, this east gate was shut up because God Himself has entered through it. The gate is to remain shut forever as a reminder that God's presence is with Israel again. The idea of the shut gate also means that God's presence will never leave Israel again.
  - b) In Verse 3, we get introduced to a new character called the "prince".
    - i) Scholars have debated and wondered for many years just who is this "prince". There are some Christian scholars who argue it is Jesus and others say it is not.
    - ii) Whoever this prince is, this guy is allowed to "eat in the presence of God".
    - iii) This is not the first reference to this "prince" character. He is mentioned in Ezekiel 34:24 and 37:25. In both those cases it refers to David. Some believe it is David himself who "reappears" as the local leader of Israel and in is rewarded for eternity by getting to eat in the presence of God. Others believe it is a "son of David". Since Jesus is a "Son of David" that is a possible true. We'll discuss this character a lot more in the next lesson.
    - iv) The point here is that this prince cannot use the East Gate, but he is allowed to use the eastern entrance into the interior part of the sanctuary.

14. Verse 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.
- a) In Verse 4, we are back to the "man" who was Ezekiel's tour guide. This is the guy who measured the temple and was yelling out measurements for Ezekiel to write down. Some argue this "man" represents the Messiah (Jesus) Himself, and others say it is just an angel.
  - b) The point here is that this man brought Ezekiel into the temple from the north gate and once again, Ezekiel saw the "Glory of the Lord" filling the temple. This is very similar to Verse 3 of the previous chapter where Ezekiel also saw God "filling the temple". I don't think God came in twice. I believe it is the same event with different points being made surrounding the same key event of God entering this temple.
    - i) Just like in the beginning of Chapter 43, Ezekiel makes the point that he fell facedown knowing he was in God's presence.
15. Verse 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. <sup>6</sup> Say to the rebellious house of Israel, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Enough of your detestable practices, O house of Israel!<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Instead of carrying out your duty in regard to my holy things, you put others in charge of my sanctuary. <sup>9</sup> 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.
- a) Once again, God in this temple speaks directly to Ezekiel. My personal view is that God did not enter twice, but just spoke "twice" to Ezekiel. Each time it had a different message and different purpose of each message. Chapter 43 was God telling Ezekiel how to symbolically cleanse the altar in preparation for people making offers to God. Here in Chapter 44, the main point is how the priests are to act in this temple.
  - b) God starts by giving Ezekiel a lecture on what the Israelites have done wrong in the past. Remember that Ezekiel was trained to be a priest. God is telling Ezekiel what were the mistakes made in the past when the priests approached God. The lecture is in effect, "Don't repeat these same mistakes".
    - i) One thing to catch from this is that "life is not perfect" in the Millennium. Even with Jesus ruling over the world, sin still exists and requires forgiveness.
    - ii) Among the Israelites past sins including bringing foreigners into the temple. Apparently slaves were brought in to assist the Levites in their rituals. There are a handful of references in "Kings" to slaves and apparently some slaves were brought in the temple area for service. While there is no direct reference to what Ezekiel is talking about, it apparently was a commonly accepted fact.
  - c) The reason God is stating all of this is that when this new temple is built, God wants the Israelites to understand that all the rituals must be completed based on the way God wished to be worshipped and no exceptions were allowed. That includes having the priests being ceremonially cleaned and doing all the rituals themselves. When all of this happens, the Israelites will not be allowed to let their "old ways" be part of their rituals.
  - d) The idea of no foreigners in the sanctuary also is a hint that only the "saved" are to take part in these temple rituals. The idea is that serving God is not a requirement to be saved, but a privilege of one who is already saved.
  - e) OK John, once again, what does all of this mean for me and my life? It gets back to the idea of living a "Holy" life for God. We as Christians don't perform sacrificial rituals. What we are asked to do is have our lives make a difference for God in all that we do. This includes our "every day" life and not just our Sunday life. God is indirectly saying to us that no compromises are allowed in service that we do on His behalf.

16. Verse 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Yet I will put them in charge of the duties of the temple and all the work that is to be done in it.
- a) If you recall, a "subset" of the Levites called the "family of Zadok" are the ones who actually do the sacrificing in this new Temple. The rest of the Levites may serve as supporting roles, which is what is being described in these verses.
  - b) These verses say in the past, it was the Levites who allowed "idol worship" to be mixed in with the worship of God. In other words, there were sin issues mixed in their worship, except for the descendants of Zadok, who again were Levites.
    - i) OK, this is interesting ancient and future history. How does it affect me? It teaches that what we do and don't do in life has future consequences. The Levites (other than the Zadok family) were guilty of mixing idolatry with the worship of God. The price for that sin is the "Levites" have to bear the consequences of their sins (Verse 12) and they cannot come "near" to God to offer the sacrifices.
    - ii) Let me put it this way: Are we saved by grace alone? Yes, but we also have rewards in heaven based on how we lived. Further, sin not only affects us, but it also affects those around us. The consequences of sin are often past on to others. God made an example of the Levites bad behavior and keeps that reminder in the future. The point for us to learn is our sinful behavior affects the lives of others.
    - iii) I'm not arguing one has to be perfect. I'm arguing for the confession of sins. I'm arguing for turning to God completely and not mixing our efforts for God with other things. Whatever we do, dedicate to God, be it time or effort or money should be completely dedicated to God and not mixed with other things.
17. Verse 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. <sup>16</sup> They alone are to enter my sanctuary; they alone are to come near my table to minister before me and perform my service.
- a) Just as the Levites were singled out for idolatry, so Zadok and his family were singled out as being loyal to God. In short Zadok was loyal to King David and King Solomon and he and his sons performed duties faithfully as the High Priests. (See 1st Samuel 15).
    - i) The point is just as the Levites were singled out for turning to idolatry, so Zadok and his family has "eternal positive consequences" for their loyalty to God. Does this mean they were perfect? No. It just means they were loyal to God and did their jobs as they were supposed to do.
  - b) Does this mean if I am loyal to God, then my eternal reward is "more service to God"? That is not exactly true. A better way of looking at this is to say, "If I pass on good characteristics to my children, it will benefit them and future generations. If my children see my loyalty to God, then He won't forget that loyalty and there are long term benefits that are past on to future generations."
  - c) Look at this another way: If one has a choice of spending eternity in hell or eternity serving God, which would you choose? I'm not sure what we do in heaven, but I can guarantee you it won't be boring. ☺ We don't just sit there all day praising God. I promise God will give us things to do and a eternal life to "live" as well as enjoy.

- d) Meanwhile, back to the Zadok's. ☺ In the millennium, God will know who are their descendants and they have the privilege of being God's priests and getting to make the offerings before God to Him. How do we know the descendants of Zadok will act appropriately? I don't know the details but I trust in God to "work that out".
- i) The last we read of the Zadok, is that his descendants were in charge of sacrifices in the temple. Just because there has been a several thousand year time gap does not negate the fact that in the future, it is His line who were the "Head Priests", and his family line stays in charge of the worship rituals in the new temple.
18. Verse 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.<sup>18</sup> They are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists. They must not wear anything that makes them perspire.<sup>19</sup> 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.
- a) OK, enough about "good priests and bad priests". ☺ Now we start to discuss the duties of the priests and just what they do in this temple.
- b) These three verses essentially say that in the millennium, there are special clothes to be worn by the priests and those clothes are to remain on site. Those clothes will all be made out of linen. In other words, no wool, cotton or polyester is permitted. ☺ Why linen? The short answer is linen prevents sweat. It "breathes better" than other materials. So why is sweat so bad? It is a symbol of one's purity before God.
- i) Let me go off on a small tangent about "sweat". Why is it so bad? Don't we have to work hard to make an effort for God? Yes ministry is hard work in that it often requires a lot of hours to accomplish goals. At the same time, "sweat" should not be involved in the process. Let me explain further.
- ii) In whatever ministry God has called us to, it should be something one enjoys doing. You may not understand why I write about 12 pages a week, but even though it requires a lot of effort, I don't "sweat" in the sense this is what I enjoy.
- iii) How does one know if they are in the right ministry? The answer is it is something one enjoys doing. There is no "sweat" as one enjoys that anyway. Further, "ministry work" for God can be anything and everything one enjoys. I know Christians who organize events around certain sports they love. Others have a gift for singing. A good church ministry is one where the leaders say in effect, "Is that what you enjoy doing for God? Go ahead!"
- iv) Churches become ineffective when they start to force people to join specific programs as opposed to doing what they enjoy doing. Churches do lots of "stuff" in God's name to try to grow that church. In the end, it makes little difference. The key is not to organize everyone in specific roles and groups, but to let people do what they enjoy doing for God. What about needs to be fulfilled in the church? Pray for those needs. If God wants that job filled, then God will provide someone to do it. What about things no one wants to do? As I've said before, doing what one wants for God does not get one out of their share of say washing dishes. ☺
- c) Meanwhile, back to the verses. These verses teach us a few more things about the millennium. It teaches we do wear clothes and that there are special clothes to be worn in the temple. It also teaches that those who work in this temple have a "day job" and a "home life" in that they are allowed to leave the temple to spend time doing other things.
- i) This is a reminder that to be "100% loyal to God" does not mean we spend 100% of our time in prayer and worship. To be holy dedicated to God means we are conscious that all we do, not just our "Sunday behavior" is what counts.

19. Verse 20: "They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow long, but they are to keep the hair of their heads trimmed.
- a) Verse 20 teaches us that there are still barbers in the millennium. ☺ The verse says the priests are neither to shave their heads nor let their hair grow long. This probably had to do with the fact that there were some pagan rituals involving cutting all of one's hair.
    - i) There is a false view in Christianity that it does not matter what one looks like when one goes to church as long as one's heart is loyal to God. If that was true, why does God care about the length of the priest's hair?
    - ii) I'm a big believer that going to church does mean dressing appropriately and the definition of "appropriate" depends on the culture and the church. I don't believe we should stand out in church based on what we are wearing. In church we are to draw attention to God and not ourselves. I'm not arguing to wear a certain type of outfit to church, but simply to dress appropriately for that church and that culture.
    - iii) Even if you don't care how you dress, remember that we are always witnesses for God. We may not care, but it may matter to the person we are witnessing to.
    - iv) In summary, this line about hair length is a reminder to look "appropriate" for church and how we look should not draw attention to ourselves in church.
20. Verse 21: No priest is to drink wine when he enters the inner court.
- a) Verse 21 says that a priest may not drink alcohol when on duty. Notice it is permitted off duty, but not "on duty". The idea is not take anything that clouds one's judgment when it comes to worshipping God. This would not only apply to alcohol, but to anything that would cloud our minds and our focus on worshipping God.
  - b) The point of this verse is not about avoiding say, medicines. If one has a headache before church, it is ok to take an aspirin. ☺ This verse is about not coming to worship while taking things such as alcohol that affect our judgment.
21. Verse 22: They must not marry widows or divorced women; they may marry only virgins of Israelite descent or widows of priests.
- a) Verse 22 limits the marriage of priests to virgin children of Israelites. Why is that? It is a symbol of "holiness". Why would marrying a widow be bad? Again, there is nothing wrong with marrying a widow or even a divorced woman in "healthy circumstances". This is a special requirement for Jewish priests as a symbolic gesture of keeping one's self pure. Notice the requirement is only for priests, and not for "everyone".
  - b) Notice that a widow of another priest is allowed as an exception. A wife of a deceased priest would already understand what that lifestyle is about, so an exception is made.
22. Verse 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.
- a) Verse 23 says that the priests duty (besides the sacrifices) is to teach the people the difference between what is "clean and unclean" before God.
    - i) To understand what is "clean and unclean" is a study of the book of Leviticus. To make it short, certain behavior is considered "clean", certain ways of dressing, certain foods to eat and "so on" are considered "clean behavior".
  - b) The violation of these "clean" laws was not a death sentence, just a period of time of separation from God. It is like the principal that "our sins have separated us from our God". The idea is that the priests were to teach the "common people" what God considered holy and to get people to stick to those standards not only in their worship of God but in their life as well. It means that yes, there will be sermons in the millennium!  
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23. Verse 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.
- a) There is another duty of the priests in the future: They will rule as judges.

- b) In this 1,000-year period of time, it is not a democracy; it is a "kingdom", with Jesus (The Messiah) ruling as the king. Therefore, judges are not elected, but "appointed". The priests will also serve as judges and make decisions according to God's laws.
  - c) This is further proof that life will not be perfect during the millennium. Yes, all the Israelites will know God, but just because they know Him, does not mean they will act perfectly. All of this implies that sin still exists. It is the same way Christians want to live under God's rule, but we still make mistakes and we still sin.
  - d) During this 1,000-year period, "time" will still be kept. It is not as if everyone is just living in paradise and no one cares about time. People will still need to eat and still need to work. I don't know if the same calendar will be used as used today, but there will still be a 7-day week and the Jews will keep most of the feast days as Moses' prescribed. The details on which feasts are to be kept will be described in the next few chapters.
24. Verse 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. <sup>26</sup> After he is cleansed, he must wait seven days. <sup>27</sup> 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.
- a) In Leviticus (21:11), there was a law where a priest was not allowed to go near a dead person, even a close relative. In the future, there were exceptions made for relatives.
  - b) The first thing to catch is that "death" will still exist in this millennium time period. Even with Satan bound up during this time (Revelation 20:2) and Jesus ruling, the concept of death will still exist. There are clues that people will live a lot longer (See Isaiah 65:20) but this verse indicates the concept of death still exists.
  - c) With that said, why are priests forbidden to go near dead people. The idea is that "dead bodies" are associated with death and God wants His priests to be associated with life and "eternal life". Most Jewish Rabbi's today do not go to cemeteries in order to not be near dead bodies as part of a funeral ritual.
    - i) So why is an exception made for close relatives in the future? It is not known. It may be that because "all know God" in the future, an exception is made. Even if a priest does this, he still must wait seven days and do a sin offering for being near a dead body, even that of a close relative.
25. Verse 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. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> The priests must not eat anything, bird or animal, found dead or torn by wild animals.
- a) Verse 28 says that God is to be to be the only inheritance the priests have. In other words, when God sets up this future system in Israel, it is similar to when the Israelites first settled in Israel in that the Levites do not get a section of land for themselves. We'll read later in Ezekiel that all the other tribes of Israel get land grants, except for the Levites.
  - b) What it means, among other things, is that the priests are 100% dependant upon other Jews to make regular sacrifices so that the Levites will have food to eat. How do Levites get "other stuff" since their food is provided via offerings and they have their uniforms when on duty? The answer is they can sell extra food for other provisions. Since God says nothing about selling such foods implies that this is permitted.
  - c) In other words, the survival of the priests is 100% dependant upon the Israelites to worship God in the way prescribed. I'm not sure what is the penalty to fail to make such regular offerings, but I wouldn't want to be in "striking distance" of them to find out. ☺ Remember that all Israelites "know God" and that assumes there is a built in desire in all Israelites to want to worship God in the way that God desires to be worshipped.

26. Let me sum up the lesson with this thought: If, some time from now, you forget most of the details about life during the millennium for the Jews, that is not nearly as important as understanding the concept of "Holiness" before God.
- The important point is for us to understand that God wants us Christians to "separate ourselves" for God.
  - So what does that mean practically? How do I "separate myself" for God? Do I have to quit my job and become a pastor? The important thing is not what specific role we have, but the idea that each of us does have some role. The idea is to do what we enjoy doing, but somehow do it for Christ. The point is also that we pray and study God's word as to how we are to live our lives.
  - It is not just a matter of understanding what God wants for us, but a matter of "living it". It is a matter of understanding that if we come to God by faith, then we don't just go about our "merry way" once we make that commitment. If we have truly given our hearts to God, then we want to live to make a difference for God in all that we do. We want to live "Holy lives" in that we want to be pleasing to God in all that we do.
27. While I'm on a roll, let's pray: Father, help us to live lives that are pleasing to You. Help us to be aware of conduct that needs correcting and be a good witness for You in all that we do. Help us to understand what You want of us in our lives and not try to control others to fit in "our image" of what God wants for others. Be with us, as we live to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Below is a picture of the altar as described in Chapter 43.

