

Ezk 44-46 – A New Order of Worship

In the previous chapters, Ezekiel was given a vision of the glory as the Messiah restored Israel and established His kingdom. As we discussed last week, these events are still in the future, so this prophetic vision was at least 2700 years ahead of its fulfillment. The vision continues through the end of the book, and today we are looking at the midsection of that vision. The first portion dealt with the new temple which will be built, this second portion deals with the new order of worship in that temple, and then the last portion will address the land allotments for the tribes, and changes which will come because of the Messiah's presence.

The portion we looked at last week finished with the return of God's glory to His temple. God declared that He would dwell in the midst of His people forever. Once He was dwelling in His temple, the true worship could begin. As we get into chapter 44, the focus turns to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces east. This is the gate through which God's glory entered the temple, and now the prophet is told (v. 2) "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." The Eastern gate of the old Temple had always remained open, but now it is to be closed. This would be an object lesson of the temple's sanctity, now that God took up permanent residence there.

Ezekiel was brought around to the north gate, and when he saw the glory of God filling the temple, he fell on his face. God ordered him to give instructions to Israel regarding their worship, reminding them once again of their former abominations and calling them to holiness. Verses 6-9 emphasize how Israel had allowed uncircumcised foreigners into the sanctuary. Interestingly, a recent study of clay seals excavated from the Temple Mount area indicated that Egyptians were hired to perform administrative duties there. Ezekiel's text indicates they were actually allowed to keep the charge of the sanctuary, even entering the inner court to assist the priests. To prevent such abuse in the future temple, God declared that the entrances were to be well marked, so no foreigner who was uncircumcised in heart or flesh would be permitted to approach God's altar. Notice the emphasis included the heart. Anyone who approaches God must submit to Him in faith and obedience – it's not really about national identity or ethnicity, but about submission.

In the instructions to the priests, God ordered them to wear linen garments when they ministered in the sanctuary, and then when their service was done, they were to change out of their linen garments in the chambers between the inner and outer courts, and put on their regular clothing once again. In v. 19, God said this was so they would not "transmit holiness" to the people with their priestly garments. By this, God was giving the priests and the people a vivid picture of just how holy and set apart He is from them. In v. 23, the priests were to "teach my people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean." This is something that is sadly lacking in much of Christianity today. Too often we treat the holy God of Heaven as though He was our buddy, or common like us. We may have been brought near by the blood of Christ, but He is still the Almighty, Most Holy Lord, and we must reverence Him as unique, set apart, and the majesty on high.

When the Jews first came into possession of the land, it was divided among the tribes. Once again, under the Messianic Kingdom, the land will be divided, but this time the allotments begin with setting apart a portion for God and His prince. In chapter 45, Ezekiel is told that in Messiah's kingdom, there will be a holy district set aside, 8.3 miles long by 6.6 miles wide. This holy district will be divided in two portions, the northern section for the Levites, and the southern section, with the Sanctuary itself, for the

priests. Instead of being scattered throughout the land as in the OT, the priests and Levites will live right next to where they serve. To the south of the priest's portion will be the allotment for the city itself. East and west of this holy district, land was set aside for the prince, so that he could support himself and meet his responsibilities of providing public offerings on behalf of the people. No longer will the people be subject to royal confiscation of lands or produce. Measurements will comply with a true standard, so the people will be able to willingly give to the Lord.

In the order of worship (ch 46), God gives precise instructions regarding the entry and exit of the people. Those who enter by the North gate are to exit via the South, and those who enter by the South gate are to exit via the North, while the prince would enter through and stand by the Eastern gate, presiding over the worship. God is a God of order, and He wants orderliness to prevail in worship, as we see in 1 Cor 14:40. Another possible application of this instruction is that when we leave the worship service, we should be a different person than when we came in. The worship of God should change us and set us on a straightforward path following Him. The sacrifices mentioned are larger than those in the Mosaic law, implying that worship in the Millennium will be characterized by more willing liberality, reflecting hearts that are wholly given to God.

The worship services outlined in these chapters remind me of the Lord's statement in John 4:23-24, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." We aren't living in the Millennial kingdom, nor do we have that temple in which to worship our great God and Savior, but we are able to worship Him in the splendor of holiness, as Psalm 96:9 exhorts. Let's close the service with a congregational reading of Psalm 96:7-9.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!