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TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Ezekiel - Lesson 44B- 45A

Chapter 44:4-31, 45:1-8

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- Today we return to Ezekiel 44 to finish the chapter looking at the rules for the priests of that coming day

Ezek. 44:4 Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD, and I fell on my face.

Ezek. 44:5 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 statutes of the house of the LORD and concerning all its laws; and mark well the entrance of the house, with all exits of the sanctuary.

- Ezekiel’s escort takes him inside the inner court by way of the north gate
 - As he approaches the entrance to the temple, he can see the glory of the Lord filling the house, and down he goes again
 - Notice how Ezekiel cannot even stand in the presence of the Lord’s glory and power
- And then the voice of the Lord speaks to Ezekiel from this future moment in the temple
 - He tells Ezekiel to report everything that he’s seeing and hearing to the people of Israel concerning their temple
 - The point of these revelations is to share them with Israel, so that the people would know them
 - In fact, that’s the purpose of everything God reveals through His prophets, that God’s people would know what has been revealed
- But beyond the temple itself, the Lord also has a message for the people of Israel regarding how they dealt with the previous temple

Ezek. 44:6 “You shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, **Ezek. 44:7** when you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to profane it, even My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void — this in addition to all your abominations.

Ezek. 44:8 “And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set foreigners to keep charge of My sanctuary.”

Ezek. 44:9 ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary.

- In Ezekiel’s day, and in generations prior, the people of Israel had committed uncountable abominations against the Lord
- This book is the primary record of those abominations, so we need not repeat them here

- But now the Lord contrasts Israel’s defiling of the temple to the immense glory the temple will have in the Kingdom
 - As an example, the Lord says the people of Israel brought foreigners who were uncircumcised in heart and flesh into the temple
 - To be uncircumcised in the flesh means to be Gentile, that is to not have a part in the covenants of Israel
 - But to be uncircumcised in the spirit means to be unbelieving, to not have the Spirit of God giving the person new spiritual life
 - So the Jews allowed unbelieving Gentiles to enter into a place reserved exclusively for Jews and even the priests
 - The Mosaic Covenant established these rites and rituals for Israel alone, and Gentiles have no part in that covenant
 - But the nation had allowed Gentiles to defile the temple
 - And more than that, the Lord says Gentiles were allowed to eat of sacred foods reserved for sacrifice or for priests
 - And if that weren’t bad enough, it seems Israel may have allowed foreigners to officiate in the temple as if they were priests
 - We know Joshua employed Gibeonites to serve at the altar as water carriers (Josh 9:23-27)
 - So apparently that set a precedent that continued afterward until Gentiles were serving in greater capacities
 - But now the Lord says in v.9 that in the Kingdom, no natural man who is uncircumcised in flesh and spirit may enter His sanctuary
 - We know that the nations stream to the temple to celebrate feasts and holy days
 - Yet apparently, unbelieving citizens will not be allowed to enter the temple grounds in the Kingdom
 - And of course in that day the heart of a person will be known by God so the rule will be enforced perfectly
- And then turning to the Levitical priests, the Lord changes the rules for how the priests serve and where they will come from within Israel

Ezek. 44:10 “But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear the punishment for their iniquity.

Ezek. 44:11 “Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them.

Ezek. 44:12 “Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn against them,” declares the Lord GOD, “that they shall bear the punishment for their iniquity.

Ezek. 44:13 “And they shall not come near to Me to serve as a priest to Me, nor come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they will bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed.

Ezek. 44:14 “Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, of all its service and of all that shall be done in it.

- The Lord reminds the Levites that they stood by as Israel went astray, allowing the profaning of the temple over the centuries
 - As Israel descended into idolatry and depravity, the priests even officiated over the pagan rituals
 - Remember back in Ezekiel 8 we read:

Ezek. 8:16 Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.

Ezek. 8:17 He said to me, “Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose.

Ezek. 8:18 “Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them.”

- The Lord showed Ezekiel 24 priests and the high priest bowing to the sun as it rises, in pagan worship ritual
- They were standing on the threshold of the temple preparing to serve in the temple that day
- Because of the unfaithfulness of God’s ministers in that day, He says the Levitical priests will officiate in a more limited way in the Kingdom
 - Notice in v.13 the Lord says they shall not come near Him in this time
 - This is different than under the Mosaic law, where the offerer kills his own sacrifice, not the priest
 - The priest offered the sacrifice on the altar and took blood into the Holy Place
- But in the Kingdom, the priests have a more limited role
 - They will have oversight of the house and gates, slaughtering animals and ministering to the people who worship there
 - They now do the “dirty” work for the worshippers, ministering to them in the temple
 - Only one family of priests will be allowed to serve Christ as before

Ezek. 44:15 “But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My

sanctuary when the sons 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.

Ezek. 44:16 “They shall enter My sanctuary; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge.

- Among the Levitical priests, only the sons of Zadok will be permitted to approach the Lord in the sanctuary
 - Zadok was the high priest who remained loyal to David during the time that the house of Saul was contending with David for the throne
 - As David fled from Absalom and left Jerusalem, we read this:

2Sam. 15:23 While all the country was weeping with a loud voice, all the people passed over. The king also passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over toward the way of the wilderness.

2Sam. 15:24 Now behold, Zadok also came, and all the Levites with him carrying the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar came up until all the people had finished passing from the city.

2Sam. 15:25 The king said to Zadok, “Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation.

- Zadok took the ark of the covenant and followed David as David fled
 - He was demonstrating that he knew David was the the Lord’s anointed, not Absalom
 - Because of Zadok’s faithfulness, the Lord makes Zadok and his sons the only priests who will officiate in the Kingdom
- There’s a great picture in that story of our time now in the Church
 - David’s departure from Jerusalem pictures Jesus being rejected by His own people, Israel
 - Because of that rejection, Jesus departs for a time
- And David’s command to the priests to remain behind with the Ark pictures the Church remaining behind on earth for a time
 - Just as the Glory of God dwelled on the Ark, so does the Spirit of God dwell in the body of Christ, the church
 - And just as David said the Ark should remain in Jerusalem until he returned, so does the Church remain on earth waiting for Christ
 - And just as Zadok’s faithfulness to David gave him the right to minister in the Kingdom temple...
 - So will our faithfulness give us opportunity to reign in the Kingdom
- To finish the chapter, we look at the dress and conduct of these priests

Ezek. 44:17 “It shall be that when they enter at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and wool shall not be on them while they are ministering in the gates of the inner court and in the house.

Ezek. 44:18 “Linen turbans shall be on their heads and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything which makes them sweat.

Ezek. 44:19 “When they go out into the outer court, into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers; then they shall put on other garments so that they will not transmit holiness to the people with their garments.

- First, all the dress of the priests of Zadok will be linen, not wool
 - There are theories for why linen is required
 - First, linen is a product of plants while wool is the product of animals
 - Since God used animal skins to cover the first sin, linen pictures our purity without need for atonement
 - Just as saints in the Bible are pictured dressed in linen, being clothed in Christ’s righteousness
 - Furthermore, the Lord said His priests could not sweat
 - Sweat makes a priest ritually unclean
 - Obviously, wool is warmer and makes one sweat, while linen is cooler
 - Interestingly, the priests may not take their garments out of the temple
 - The Lord says in v.19 He doesn’t want the priests to transmit their holiness to the people
 - The word transmit isn’t found in the original Hebrew
 - In fact, the Septuagint says “so they shall not sanctify the people”
 - By that we understand God is saying He does not want to expose the common man to what the priests experienced in the presence of God
 - This suggests that perhaps their clothing will radiate as Moses’ face did after encountering God in the tent of meeting
 - So unbelievers can’t enter the temple and neither will the unbelieving world see the glory of God reflected on the priests
- From these details we begin to see the requirement for faith in the Kingdom just as it is today (and has always been)
 - Students of the Bible naturally wonder how it could be that a world ruled by Christ could include unbelievers
 - Most assume that Jesus will be visible in the world
 - And we assume that supernatural displays will be common
 - And even the fact that we live among the world in our glorified bodies should be proof enough to bring faith
 - But if you think a moment longer, you come to realize these things *can’t* be true in

the Kingdom

- Hebrews says:

Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- And Paul adds:

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

- The Bible teaches that faith is an expression of hope because it accepts something as true before it can be “seen” or experienced in reality
 - Once something can be seen, accepting the truth of it no longer requires faith... it’s become self-evident
 - Nor should it gain us anything, because God Himself gains no glory when we acknowledge the obvious
- So God’s plan of salvation depends on faith, trusting in the promises of God found in His word concerning things yet to come
 - We place our faith in thing that cannot be seen: Christ’s atoning death, our future resurrection and judgment
 - God’s word has made promises to us concerning these matters, and faith is required to accept them
- Now imagine if Jesus were visible in His glorified form to the unbelieving world?
 - They would certainly acknowledge Jesus, but that acknowledgement wouldn’t be based on faith in God’s word
 - It would merely be a self-evident truth, and acknowledging Jesus under those circumstances wouldn’t result in salvation
 - No more than at the final judgment when Paul says:

Phil. 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

Phil. 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Phil. 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- At the final judgment, all humanity from all history will come to understand the truth that Jesus is Lord
 - In that moment, Paul says every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that truth
 - Notice the various places where humanity will exist when they make this

confession

- Some are above the earth, others on the earth, but importantly some are still *below the earth*
- Obviously, those below the earth refers to souls enduring eternal judgment
 - Paul says they too will confess Christ as Lord, yet they remain in judgment despite their confession
 - Why? Because at that point their confession is simply an acknowledgement of self-evident truth...no faith required
 - And so it does not bring salvation
- Therefore, since unbelief remains part of life during the Kingdom, then faith must still be the means to salvation
 - And if faith is required, then the truth of Christ will not be self-evident – at least not in the sense that it nullifies the need for faith
 - That’s one reason Jesus is not roaming the earth in His glorified form but rather He remains in the Holy of Holies
 - The testimony of that day will be that our Lord is resident in the temple, reigning and ruling
 - But accepting that testimony will require faith, since unbelievers will not see Jesus nor will they be permitted to enter the temple
 - Moreover, the priests will leave the temple dressed like ordinary people
 - They leave their garments back in the temple
 - And then there’s the issue of our appearance and, for the same reason, we should assume that our glorified appearance won’t vary dramatically
 - We should expect that our physical construction will mirror the one we have now albeit without sin or disease or weaknesses
 - Perhaps our appearance will remain essentially the same (just fewer wrinkles and maybe a little thinner)
 - And if so, that may be the way we’ll recognize each other
 - And perhaps most amazing, our sinless nature won’t make us radically different from the sinner
 - We can live side by side with the natural man or woman and yet our sinlessness won’t challenge their understanding of God
 - They won’t look at us and be amazed at the difference, so that it causes them to believe in Jesus
 - Perhaps they recognize us as being “kind” or “upright” or perhaps they will think we’re weird and resent us for our perfection
 - It’s a situation I know very well (joke)
 - But one thing we can know for sure: our sinless nature won’t nullify faith for those who remain sinful
 - Remember, Jesus lived a sinless life, and yet none of his earthly brothers were moved by what they saw to believe in His claims

- So if sinless Jesus could live side by side with unbelievers without them noticing, we should expect to do the same
- The more we consider these issues, the more reason we have to look forward to the Kingdom life
 - It's going to be everything we like about life today and nothing we don't
 - It's going to be a life with fulfillment in place of disappointment
 - A life with meaning instead of one that sometimes seems senseless
 - It's a life with a rhythm and stability that eliminates fear or worry
 - A life where the prospect of growing old and dying are gone, where the consequences of sin are no more
 - Our days will be filled with work we enjoy, pastimes that don't hurt us or others, and possessions that never fade away
 - And for the unbeliever, the same will be true so long as they do not sin, and if they come to faith during their first 100 years
 - And in the midst of that near-perfect world, the unbeliever will be told that must believe in Jesus if they want to continue in that bliss
 - Though we may assume that such a great world would make faith easier to come by, the reality will be the exact opposite
 - When the world is experiencing such bliss, faith will be harder
 - Just as today when people are comfortable in their circumstances, they find little reason to consider a change
 - Especially not a change as significant as repenting of their present way of life to embrace a new one in Jesus
- Moving back to the priests, we have a series of rules for proper conduct

Ezek. 44:20 “Also they shall not shave their heads, yet they shall not let their locks grow long; they shall only trim the hair of their heads.

Ezek. 44:21 “Nor shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter the inner court.

Ezek. 44:22 “And they shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman but shall take virgins from the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest.

Ezek. 44:23 “Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Ezek. 44:24 “In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My sabbaths.

- The priest can't drink on the job, can't look like a hippie, and must marry a respectable woman (i.e., a virgin)
 - That reference to marrying raises a huge red flag for us, because it indicates that

the priests will be natural men

- Which brings us back to the question of whether all Israel will be glorified or not
- Earlier, I addressed this question by noting how Scripture indicates that Israel will all know the Lord and obey Him perfectly

Jer. 31:31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **Jer. 31:32** not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Jer. 31:33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Jer. 31:34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- Jeremiah says there will be no need for one Jew to teach another Jew to know and obey the Lord
- They will all have the law on their hearts so that they may follow it perfectly
- Perfect knowledge and obedience to God strongly suggests that all Israel will be glorified just as all the Church saints will be
 - And if Israel is glorified then they won’t marry, since Jesus says in Matt 22:30 that the glorified are like angels not marrying
 - That is hard to reconcile with the command to teach Israel about things clean and profane
- Nevertheless, here we have a reference to the descendants of the priests of Zadok marrying women
 - Clearly if priests are descendants of Zadok, then they are Jewish
 - And if they are marrying, they are natural men which would mean that not all Israel is glorified
 - Moreover, in v.23 we’re told the priests explain the difference between what is holy and profane to Israel
 - By their teaching, the Lord says Israel will discern between unclean and clean
 - And in v.24 were told the priests will judge over disputes among the people of Israel
 - Sinless people don’t enter into disputes, presumably, nor do they require judging
 - Admittedly, this is one of the most difficult concepts in eschatology, and I haven’t resolved it yet
 - Somehow it must be true that Israel fully knows and obeys the Lord in the Kingdom

- And yet it's also possible for priests to have wives and to need the judgment and instruction
 - At the very least, we know the Old Testament saints will be resurrected and glorified just as the Church will be
- So perhaps there are some of both among Israel, yet even that answer doesn't fully resolve the question
 - Further complicating our understand, we find these tantalizing details

Ezek. 44:25 “They shall not go to a dead person to defile themselves; however, for father, for mother, for son, for daughter, for brother, or for a sister who has not had a husband, they may defile themselves.

Ezek. 44:26 “After he is cleansed, seven days shall elapse for him.

Ezek. 44:27 “On the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 44:28 “And it shall be with regard to an inheritance for them, that I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel — I am their possession.

Ezek. 44:29 “They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs.

Ezek. 44:30 “The first of all the first fruits of every kind and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions, shall be for the priests; you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough to cause a blessing to rest on your house.

Ezek. 44:31 “The priests shall not eat any bird or beast that has died a natural death or has been torn to pieces.

- In v.25 the Lord says the priests cannot visit a dead body unless that dead body is part of their family
 - Here again, only a natural, unsaved person will die in the Kingdom, as we learned in Isaiah 65
 - So if these priests have relatives who can die, then it means they have natural, unsaved Jewish family in Israel
 - Yet Jeremiah promised that all Jews in the Kingdom will know the Lord
 - Notice also in v.27 that the priest who has contact with a dead body offers “his” sin offering before he may return to officiating in the temple
 - This is a stunning statement since it implies the priest has sin
 - Here again, that makes the priest a natural born person, or so it would seem
 - Clearly, there is a gap in our understanding here, which cannot be resolved easily
 - Finally, as it was with the levitical priests of the Mosaic Law, these priests will depend upon the gifts to the temple for their supply
 - The priests have no other inheritance in the land except the temple itself

- And they shall be fed by what comes into the temple
 - Later in the book we study the specific allotments for the tribes, including for the priests
- The final verses teach a common principle of the Bible, both for Old Testament, New Testament and Kingdom times:
 - Those who minister to God’s people are to expect their supply from God’s people
 - According to Leviticus, the priests could not eat meat killed in any way except meat sacrificed in the temple
 - That was the only source of meat for priests serving in the temple
 - In New Testament times, the same principle applies as Paul explains

1Cor. 9:13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?

1Cor. 9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

- Those who devote their life to the purpose of the Gospel should expect to see their needs met by the church body
- Elsewhere, Paul explains that this system is to the benefit of the Church
- This system ensures that God’s servants have maximum opportunity to serve us spiritually
- And in the Kingdom, the same principle continues on
 - The priests in the temple will receive the first fruits of the people of Israel as their payment
 - And as we’ll learn later, they live in the temple as their inheritance in the Kingdom
 - And as it was under Moses, they only eat meat sacrificed in the temple
 - Knowing there will be many priests in the Kingdom, it also tells us how much sacrificing will go on at the temple
- Now in Chapter 45 we begin to see how the Lord divides the land, starting with the land for the priests and the prince

Ezek. 45:1 “And when you divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an allotment to the LORD, a holy portion of the land; the length shall be the length of 25,000 cubits, and the width shall be 20,000. It shall be holy within all its boundary round about.

Ezek. 45:2 “Out of this there shall be for the holy place a square round about five hundred by five hundred cubits, and fifty cubits for its open space round about.

Ezek. 45:3 “From this area you shall measure a length of 25,000 cubits and a width of 10,000 cubits; and in it shall be the sanctuary, the most holy place.

Ezek. 45:4 “It shall be the holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the

ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to the LORD, and it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary.

Ezek. 45:5 “An area 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in width shall be for the Levites, the ministers of the house, and for their possession cities to dwell in.

Ezek. 45:6 “You shall give the city possession of an area 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long, alongside the allotment of the holy portion; it shall be for the whole house of Israel.

Ezek. 45:7 “The prince shall have land on either side of the holy allotment and the property of the city, adjacent to the holy allotment and the property of the city, on the west side toward the west and on the east side toward the east, and in length comparable to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border.

Ezek. 45:8 “This shall be his land for a possession in Israel; so My princes shall no longer oppress My people, but they shall give the rest of the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes.”

- The Lord says the land will be assigned by lot
 - As Israel enters the Kingdom, each tribe will get an allotment of the Promised land, as the Lord directs
 - They will discern His will by throwing lots, and of course the Lord will control the outcome of each throw
 - So that by throwing lots the people of Israel come to know what the specific allocation of land will be for each tribe
 - Why didn't the Lord just publish those decisions in this book?
 - Probably for two reasons...
 - First, the allocation will be a reflection of the obedience of the various tribes, and at the time this book was written that record wasn't complete
 - Secondly, to know this allocation in advance would likely have caused strife among the tribes in the present age
 - But at the time they throw lots, the Lord says they should set aside a portion of land for the temple, the priests and for prince David
 - The space carved out will be 25,000 cubits by 20,000 cubits, which is 8.3 miles by 6.6 miles
 - This space is further divided up into sections for various uses
 - The top third of the rectangle is 25,000 x 10,000 and it holds the temple with its holy empty space
 - Outside that space the priests of Zadok live
 - Then below that in the middle section of the rectangle is a 25,000 by 5,000 cubit portion for the city of Jerusalem
 - We don't know much about the city except that it is the possession of all Israel
 - Finally, the bottom third is 25,000 by 10,000 and is the home for all non-priest Levites

- On either side of this space (outside the 25,000 x 20,000 measurement) are allotments that are equal in width to the rectangle
 - These portions are for the prince and the princes
 - So this is the land reserved for David and his senior leadership
 - The total of this space is significant, amounting to the size of Salt Lake City
 - That land is divided among a handful of people, indicating how richly the Lord will award those who please Him