

The Priests of the Millennial Temple

Ezekiel 44

Ezekiel 44:1-4 – “Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. 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. 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.”

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.”

Background Notes

If you were to join us on one of our Holy Land tours, you would see a walled-up gate in the eastern wall of the old city of Jerusalem, which is also the eastern wall of the Temple Mount. This gate is known as the Golden Gate, and many Israeli tour guides would tell you that this closed gate is the eastern gate of Ezekiel 44, and thus evidence of fulfilled prophecy. Even though I would love to impress my tour members with such a presentation, I can't - because the present walled-up Golden Gate on Jerusalem's eastern wall is **not** the walled-up eastern gate of Ezekiel 44! Here are several reasons why:

1. Verse 2 says that the Lord entered this gate before it was shut - but the Lord never passed through the present Golden Gate. The present Golden Gate did not even exist at the time of Christ. It was built later, during Byzantine times, and it was walled up during Crusader times.
2. Buried underneath the present Golden Gate is an earlier gate that is also walled up. However, this cannot be the gate of Ezekiel 44 either - even if the Lord Jesus did pass through this earlier gate - because it doesn't line up with the location of the eastern wall as given in the detailed description of the Temple complex in Ezekiel 40-42.
3. The walled-up eastern gate in Ezekiel 44 is part of the *future* millennial Temple complex - not in the *present* eastern wall of the Temple Mount. There will be major topographical changes in the Temple Mount before the much larger millennial Temple complex can be built there.

So the eastern gate of Ezekiel 44 is yet to be built, and thus yet to be closed. Notice, by the way, that verse 2 did not say that the gate will be walled up – it only said that it will be shut and permanently closed.

Doctrinal Points

1. The eastern gate and the prince have special significance during the Millennium.

Why will the future eastern gate of the future millennial kingdom be permanently closed? The answer is at the end of verse 2: *“Because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.”* When did the Lord God enter by this gate? **Or** - when **will** the Lord God enter by this gate? Ezekiel 43:4 gave us the answer, *“And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east.”*

The significance of the closed eastern gate is that the Lord will have come to permanently dwell in the midst of His people. Back in Ezekiel 10-11, the glory of the Lord left the Temple and its complex by way of the eastern gate, but now the glory of the Lord has returned, never to leave again. So the eastern gate will have special significance during the Millennium, that future 1000-year kingdom reign of Jesus Christ on this earth.

What about the prince who will sit at the gate and eat bread before the Lord (v3)? This seems to suggest participation in the fellowship or peace offerings. Who is this prince? It can't be a reference to the Lord Himself, because Ezekiel 45:22 says that the prince will offer a sin offering for himself and the people. And chapter 46:16 says that the prince has sons.

Is this prince the resurrected King David (as some have suggested), who will rule the restored Israel under the millennial kingship of Christ? Here again, the fact that this prince offers a sin offering for himself and the people and his sons does not seem to suggest that he is the “resurrected David.” Believers with their resurrected bodies during the Millennium will not be offering sin offerings or having sons. So it seems that the prince will be a vice-regent, ruling restored Israel *under Christ* during the Millennium.

Notice that the prince will sit “in the gate” – in the inside portion of the gate complex. In ancient times, official business was transacted in the city gate. “Sitting at the gate” infers the government of Jerusalem and Israel during the millennial kingdom of Christ. The eastern gate and the prince will have special significance during the Millennium.

2. The sons of Zadok have special status during the Millennium.

In Ezekiel 44:5-8, the Lord rebuked Israel for her sins against the sanctuary in the past, in view of the new Temple to come in the future: *“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.”*

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. ⁷When 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 Me food, the fat and the blood, then they broke My covenant*

because of all your abominations. ⁸ And you have not kept charge of My holy things, but you have set others to keep charge of My sanctuary for you.”

In Ezekiel 44:9-14 the Lord revealed that the apostasy of the Levites in the past, by allowing idolatry into the Temple courts, will result in their lowered status in the future millennial Temple: *“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.*

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. 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. 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. 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. 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.”

In Ezekiel 44:15-31, the Lord spoke of the ministry of the sons of Zadok who will be the priest during the millennial kingdom of Christ: *“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. ¹⁶ “They shall enter My sanctuary, and they shall come near My table to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge. 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. 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. 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.*

²⁰ “They shall neither shave their heads nor let their hair grow long, but they shall keep their hair well-trimmed. ²¹ No priest shall drink wine when he enters the inner court. 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.

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. 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.

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

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. ²⁹ They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering; every dedicated thing

in Israel shall be theirs. ³⁰ The best of all first fruits 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. ³¹ The priests shall not eat anything, bird or beast, that died naturally or was torn by wild beasts.

The “sons of Zadok” will be awarded the priesthood during the Millennium because they remained faithful to King David and to the Lord during the rebellions of David’s sons, Absalom and Adonijah. (See 2 Samuel 15 and 1 Kings 1-2.) God rewards faithfulness - then and today!

These verses gave the regulations, requirements and duties for those priests during the millennial kingdom. Notice - no high priest was mentioned in this chapter, because the Lord Himself will be both King and Priest in the millennial kingdom.

How the sons of Zadok will be recognized and chosen from among the other Levites at that time is unknown. Perhaps DNA studies will be used. We don’t know - but *the Lord knows!* The sons of Zadok will have special status during the Millennium.

Practical Application

As priests today, let us teach the way of holiness!

Notice what some of the responsibilities of the sons of Zadok will be during the Millennium: *“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. In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes” (v23-24).*

As priests, the sons of Zadok will teach the people the way of holiness. They will do it by way of mouth and by way of lives that are obedient to the Word of God. They will be called on to judge in disputes, and they will do so in line with God’s holy standards.

There is an application here for us today. As believers, we are priests. We are part of a “holy and royal priesthood” (according to 1 Peter 2). We are responsible to teach the way of holiness in what we say, and in how we live, and in the judgments that we make.

Let me ask you, how are we doing? Would the average onlooker think of you as a holy priest of the most holy God – by your words, and by the way you live your life, and in the decisions you make? As priests today, let us teach the way of holiness!