

CHAPTER 44

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The appropriating of the east gate of the temple to the prince (v. 1-3).
- II.** A reproof sent to the house of Israel for their former profanations of God's sanctuary, with a charge to them to be more strict for the future (v. 4-9).
- III.** The degrading of those Levites that had formerly been guilty of idolatry and the establishing of the priesthood in the family of Zadok, which had kept their integrity (v. 10-16).
- IV.** Divers laws and ordinances concerning the priests (v. 17-31).

~~340~~ EZEKIEL 44:1-3

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

The prophet is here brought to review what he had before once surveyed; for, though we have often looked into the things of God, they will yet bear to be looked over again, such a copiousness there is in them. The lessons we have learned we should still repeat to ourselves. Every time we review the sacred fabric of holy things, which we have in the scriptures, we shall still find something new which we did not before take notice of. The prophet is brought a third time to the east gate, and finds it shut, which intimates that the rest of the gates were open at all times to the worshippers. But such an account is given of this gate's being shut as puts honour,

1. Upon the God of Israel. It is for the honour of him that the gate of the inner court, at which his glory entered when he took possession of the house, was ever after kept shut, and no man was allowed to enter in by it, v. 2. The difference ever after made between this and the other gates, that this was shut when the others were open, was intended both to perpetuate the remembrance of the solemn entrance of the glory of the Lord into the house (which it would remain a traditional evidence of the truth of) and

also to possess the minds of people with a reverence for the Divine Majesty, and with very awful thoughts of his transcendent glory, which was designed in God's charge to Moses at the bush, *Put off thy shoe from off thy foot*. God will have a way by himself.

2. Upon the prince of Israel, v. 3. It is an honour to him that though he may not enter in by this gate, for no man may, yet,

(1.) He shall *sit in this gate* to eat his share of the peace-offerings, that sacred food, *before the Lord*.

(2.) He shall *enter by the way of the porch of that gate*, by some little door or wicket, either in the gate or adjoining to it, which is called the *say of the porch*. This as to signify that God puts some of his glory upon magistrates, upon the princes of his people, for he has said, *You are gods*. Some by the prince here understand the high priests, or the sagan or second priest; and that he only was allowed to enter by this gate, for he was God's representative. Christ is the high priest of our profession, who entered himself into the holy place, and *opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers*.

~~2304~~ EZEKIEL 44:4-9

MESSAGE TO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

This is much to the same purport with what we had in the beginning of Ezekiel 43. As the prophet must look again upon what he had before seen, so he must be told again what he had before heard. Here, as before, he sees the house *filled with the glory of the Lord*, which strikes an awe upon him, so that he falls prostrate at the sight, the humblest posture of adoration and the expression of a holy awe: *I fell upon my face*, v. 4. Note, The more we see of the glory of God the more low we shall lie in our own eyes. Now here,

I. God charges the prophet to take a very particular notice of all he saw, and all that was said to him (v. 5): "*Behold with thy eyes what is shown thee, particularly the entering in of the house and every going forth of it, all the inlets and all the outlets of the sanctuary;*" those he must take special notice of. Note, In acquainting ourselves with divine things we

must not aim so much at an abstract speculation of the things themselves as at finding the plain appointed way of converse and communion with those things, that we may *go in and out and find pasture*.

2. *Hear with thy ears all that I say unto thee* about the laws and ordinances of the house, which he was to instruct the people in. Note, Those who are appointed to be teachers have need to be very diligent careful learners, that they may neither forget any of the things they are entrusted with nor mistake concerning them.

II. He sends him upon an errand to the people, *to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel*, v. 6. It is sad to think that the house of Israel should deserve this character from him who perfectly knew them, that a people in covenant with God should be rebellious against him. Who are his subjects if the house of Israel be rebels? But it is an instance of God's rich mercy that, though they had been *rebellious*, yet, being the *house of Israel*, he does not cast them off, but sends an ambassador to them, to invite and encourage them to return to their allegiance, which he would not have done if he had been pleased to kill them. The whole race of mankind has fallen under the character here given of the house of Israel; but our Lord Jesus, when he ascended on high, received gifts for men, *yea, even for the rebellious also, that, as here, the Lord God might dwell among them*, ~~188~~ Psalm 68:18.

1. He must tell them of their faults, must show them their rebellions, must show the house of Jacob their sins. Note, Those that are sent to comfort God's people must first convince them, and so prepare them for comfort. *Let it suffice you of all your abominations*, v. 6. Note, It is time for those that have continued long in sin to reckon it long enough, and too long, and to begin to think of taking up in time, and leaving off their evil courses. *“Let the time past of your lives suffice, for by this time, surely, you have surfeited upon your abominations and have become sick of them,”* ~~188~~ 1 Peter 4:3. That which is here charged upon them is,

(1.) That they had admitted those to the privileges of the sanctuary that were not entitled to them; whereas God had said, *The stranger that comes nigh shall be put to death*, they had not only connived at the intrusion of strangers into the sanctuary, but had themselves introduced them (v. 7): *You brought in strangers uncircumcised in flesh*, and therefore under a legal incapacity to enter into the sanctuary, which was a *breaking of the*

covenant of circumcision, throwing down the hedge of their peculiarity, and laying themselves in common with the rest of the world. Yet if these strangers had been devout and good, though they were not circumcised, the crime would not have been so great; but they were *uncircumcised in heart* too, unhumbled, unreformed, and strangers indeed to God and all goodness. When they came to offer sacrifice they brought these with them to feast with them upon the sacrifice, because they were fond of their company, and this was one of their abominations, wherewith they *polluted God's sanctuary*; it was *giving that which was holy unto dogs*, ^{<1016>} Matthew 7:6. Note, The admission of those who are openly wicked and profane to special ordinances is a polluting of God's sanctuary and a great provocation to him.

(2.) That they had employed those in the service of the sanctuary who were not fit for it. Though none but priests and Levites were to minister in the sanctuary, yet we may suppose that all who were priests and Levites did not immediately attend there, but chosen men of them, who were best qualified, who were most wise, serious, and conscientious, and most likely to keep the charge of the holy things carefully; but, in making this choice, they had not regard to merit and qualification for the work: “*You have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves*, such as you had some favour or affection for, such as you either had got, or hoped to get, money by, or such as would comply with your humours and would dispense with the laws of the sanctuary to please you; *thus you have not kept the charge of my holy things.*” Note, Those who have the choice of the keepers of the holy things, if, to serve some secular selfish purpose, they choose such as are unfit and unfaithful, will justly have it laid at their door, that they have betrayed the holy things by lodging them in bad hands.

2. He must tell them their duty (v. 9): “*No stranger shall enter into my sanctuary till he has first submitted to the laws of it.*” But, lest any should think that this excluded the penitent believing Gentiles from the church, the stranger here is described to be one that is *uncircumcised in heart*, not in sincerity consenting to the covenant, nor putting away the filth of the flesh; whereas the believing Gentiles were *circumcised with the circumcision made without hands*, ^{<1011>} Colossians 2:11. This circumcision of the heart, in the *spirit, not in the letter*, was what the unbelieving Jews were strangers to and unconcerned about, while yet they were zealous to keep out of the sanctuary uncircumcised Gentiles, witness their rage

against Paul when they did but suspect him to have brought *Greeks into the temple*, ~~428~~ Acts 21:28.

~~3410~~ EZEKIEL 44:10-16

IDOLATROUS PRIESTS DEGRADED

The Master of the house, being about to set up house again, takes account of his servants the priests, and sees who are fit to be turned out of their places and who to be kept in, and takes a course with them accordingly.

I. Those who have been treacherous are degraded and put lower those Levites — or priests who were carried down the stream of the apostasy of Israel formerly, who *went astray from God after their idols* (v. 10), who had complied with the idolatrous kings of Israel or Judah, who *ministered to them before their idols* (v. 12), bowed with them in the house of Rimmon, or set up altars for them, as Urijah did for Ahaz, and so *caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity*, led them to sin and hardened them in sin; for, if the priests go astray, many will follow *their pernicious ways*. Perhaps in Babylon some of the Jewish priests had complied with the idolaters of the place, to the great scandal of their religion. Now these priests who had thus prevaricated were justly put under the mark of God's displeasure; or, if they were dead (as it is probable that they were, if the crime were committed before the captivity), the iniquity was visited upon their children. Or perhaps it was the whole family of Abiathar that had been guilty of this trespass, which was now called to account for it. And,

1. They are sentenced to be deprived, in part, of their office, and from the dignity of priests are put down into the condition or ordinary Levites. God has *lifted up his hand against them*, has said it, and sworn it, that *they shall bear their iniquity* (v. 12); assuredly they shall suffer for it, shall suffer disgrace for it; *they shall bear their shame* (v. 13), for though they have (we charitably hope) repented of it, *yet they shall not come near to do the office of a priest*, that is, those parts of the office that were peculiar to them, they shall not come near to *any of the holy things* within the sanctuary, v. 13. Note, those who have robbed God of his honour will justly be deprived of their honour. And it is really a great punishment to be forbidden to come near to God; and justly might those who have once

gone away from him be rejected as unworthy ever to come near to him and put at an everlasting distance.

2. Yet there is a mixture of mercy in this sentence. God deals not in severity, as he might have done, with those who had dealt treacherously with him, but mitigates the sentence, v. 11, 14. They are deprived but in part, *ab officio* — *of their office*, and, it should seem, not at all ... *beneficio* — *of their emoluments*. They shall help to *slay the sacrifice*, which the Levites were permitted to do, and which in this temple was done, not at the altar, but *at the tables*, ^{<34B>}Ezekiel 40:29. They shall be porters *at the gates of the house*, and they shall be *keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof*. Note, Those who may not be fit to be employed in one kind of service may yet be fit to be employed in another; and even those who have offended may yet be made use of, and not quite thrown aside, much less thrown away.

II. Those who have been faithful are honoured and established, v. 15, 16. These are remarkably distinguished from the other: “*But the sons of Zadok, who kept their integrity in a time of general apostasy, who went not astray when others did, they shall come near to me, shall come near to my table.*” Note, God will put marks of honour upon those who give proofs of their fidelity and constancy to him in shaking trying times, and will employ those in his service who have kept close to his service when others deserted it and drew back. And it ought to be reckoned a true and great reward of stability in duty to be established in it. If we keep close to God, God will keep us close to him.

<34B> EZEKIEL 44:17-31

DIRECTIONS CONCERNING THE PRIESTS

God's priests must be *regulars*, not *seculars*; and therefore here are rules laid down for them to govern themselves by and due encouragement given them to live up to those rules. Directions are here given,

I. Concerning their clothes; they must wear *linen garments* when they *went in to minister* or do any service in the inner court, or in the sanctuary, and nothing that was *woollen*, because it would *cause sweat*, v. 17, 18. They must dress themselves cool, that they might go the more readily

about their work; and they had the more need to do so because they were to attend the altars, which had constant fires upon them. And they must dress themselves clean and sweet, and avoid every thing that was sweaty and filthy, to signify the purity of mind with which the service of God is to be attended to. Sweat came in with sin and was part of the curse. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.* Clothes came in with sin, coats of skins did; and therefore the priests must use as little and as light clothing as possible, and not such as caused sweat. When they had finished their service they must change their clothes again, and lay up their linen garments in the chambers appointed for that purpose, v. 19, as before, ^{<3504>}Ezekiel 42:14. They must not go among the people with their holy garments on, lest they should imagine themselves sanctified by the touch of them; or, *They shall sanctify the people*, that is (as it is explained, ^{<3504>}Ezekiel 42:14), they shall *approach to those things which are for the people*, in their ordinary garments.

II. Concerning their hair; in that they must avoid extremes on both hands (v. 20): *They must not shave their heads*, in imitation of the Gentile priests, and as the priests of the Romish church do; nor, on the other hand, must they *suffer their locks to grow long*, as the *beaux*, or that they might be thought Nazarites, when really they were not; but they must be grave and modest, must *poll their heads* and keep their hair short. If a *man*, especially a minister, wear *long hair*, it is not becoming (^{<4114>}1 Corinthians 11:14); it is effeminate.

III. Concerning their diet; they must be sure to *drink no wine* when they went in to minister, lest they should sink to excess, should drink and forget the law, v. 21. *It is not for kings to drink wine*, more than will do them good, much less for priests. See ^{<3009>}Leviticus 10:9; ^{<3104>}Proverbs 31:4, 5.

IV. Concerning their marriages, v. 22. Here they must consult the credit of their office, and not marry one that had been *divorced*, that was at least under the suspicion of immodesty, nor a *widow*, unless she were a priest's widow, that had been accustomed to the usages of the priests' families. Others may do that which ministers may not do, but must deny themselves in, in honour of their character. Their wives as well as themselves must be of good report.

V. Concerning their preaching and church-government.

1. It was part of their business to teach the people; and herein they must approve themselves both skilful and faithful (v. 23): *They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane*, between good and evil, lawful and unlawful, that they may neither scruple what is lawful nor venture upon what is unlawful, that they may not pollute what is holy nor pollute themselves with what is profane. Ministers must take pains to cause *people to discern between the clean and the unclean*, that they may not confound the distinctions between right and wrong, nor mistake concerning them, so as to *put darkness for light and light for darkness*, but may have a good judgment of discretion concerning their own actions.

2. It was part of their business to judge upon appeals made to them (⁴⁸⁷⁸Deuteronomy 17:8, 9); and *in controversy they shall stand in judgment*, v. 24. They shall have the honesty to stand up for what is right, and, when they have passed a right judgment, shall have the courage to stand to it and stand by it. They must judge, not according to their own fancies, or inclinations, or secular interests, but *according to my judgments*; that must be their rule and standard. Note, Ministers must decide controversies according to the word of God, *to the law and to the testimony*. *Sit liber judex — Let the judge be unbiased*. Their business is to keep courts in God's name, to preside in the congregations of his people. And herein they must go to the statute-book: They shall *keep my statutes in all my assemblies*. God calls the assemblies of his people *his assemblies*, because they are held in his name, to his glory. Ministers are the masters of those assemblies, are to preside in them, and in all their acts must keep close to God's laws. Another part of their work, as church governors, is to *hallow God's sabbaths*, to do the public work of that day with a becoming care and reverence, as the work of a holy day should be done, and to see that God's people also sanctify that day and do nothing to pollute it.

VI. Concerning their mourning for dead relations; the rule here agrees with the law of Moses, (⁶²⁰¹Leviticus 21:1, 11. A priest shall not come near any *dead body* (for they must be purified *from dead works*) except of his next relations, v. 25. Decent expressions of a pious sorrow for dear relations, when they are removed by death, are not disagreeable to the character of a minister. Yet by this approach to the dead body of a relation they contracted a ceremonial pollution, from which they must be cleansed by a *sin-offering* before they went in again to minister, v. 26, 27. Note, Though sorrow for the dead is very allowable and commendable, yet there

is danger of sinning in it, either by excess or dissimulation; and those tears have too often need to be *wept over again*.

VII. Concerning their maintenance; they must live upon the altar at which they served, and live comfortably (v. 28): “*You shall give them no possession in Israel, no lands or tenements, lest they should be entangled with the affairs of this life;*” for God has said, *I am their inheritance*, and they need no other in reserve; *I am their possession*, and they need no other in hand. Some land was allowed them (⁴⁸⁰Ezekiel 48:10), but their principal subsistence was by their office. What God appropriated to himself they were the receivers of, for their own proper use and behoof; they lived upon the holy things, and so God himself was the portion both of their inheritance and of their cup. Note, Those who have God for their inheritance and their possession may be content with a little, and ought not to covet a great deal of the possessions and inheritances of this earth. If we have God, we have *all*; and therefore may well reckon that we have enough. Observe,

1. What the priests were to have from the people, for their maintenance and encouragement.

(1.) They must have the flesh of many of the offerings, the *sin-offering and trespass-offering*, which would supply them and their families with flesh-meat, and the *meat-offerings*, which would supply them with bread. What we offer to God will redound to our own advantage.

(2.) They must have every dedicated devoted thing in Israel, which was in many cases to be turned into money and given to the priest. This is explained, v. 20. *Every oblation* or free-will offering (which in times of reformation and devotion would be many and considerable) *of all, of every sort of your oblations, shall be the priest's*. We have the law concerning them Leviticus 27.

(3.) They were to have *the first of the dough* when it was going to the oven, as well as the first of their fruits when they were going to the barn. God, who is the first, must have the first; and, if it belong to him, his priests must have it. We may *then* comfortably enjoy what we have, when a share of it has been first set apart for works of piety and charity. To this the apostle's rule bears some analogy, to *begin the week* with laying by for pious uses, ⁴¹⁰1 Corinthians 16:2. The priests being so well provided for, it would be inexcusable in them if they (contrary to the law which every

Israelite is bound by) should *eat that which is torn or which died of itself*, v. 31. Those that were in want of necessary food might perhaps expect to be dispensed with in such a case. Poverty has its temptations, but the priests were so well provided for that they could have no pretence for it.

2. What the people might expect from the priest for their recompence. Those that are kind to a prophet, to a priest, shall have a prophet's, a priest's reward: *That he may cause the blessing to rest in thy house* (v. 30), that God may cause it by commanding it, that the priest may cause it by praying for it; and it was part of the priest's work to *bless the people in the name of the Lord*, not only their congregations, but their families. Note, It is all in all to the comfort of any house to have the blessing of God upon it and to have the blessing to rest in it, to dwell where we dwell and to attend the entail of it upon those that shall come after us. And the way to have the blessing of God abide upon our estates is to honour God with them, and to give him and his ministers, him and his poor, their share out of them. God blesses, he surely blesses, the habitation of those who are thus just, ~~21083~~ Proverbs 3:33. And ministers, by instructing and praying for the families that are kind to them, should do their part towards causing the blessing to rest there. *Peace be to this house.*