

Guarding the Holiness of YHWH and the Sanctity of His House**Ezekiel 44:4–31****Veritas Adult Community****The Commons, College Church****July 25, 2021****The Scripture****Regulations Regarding the Outer East Gate**

¹ Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one that faces east; but it was closed. ² Then YHWH said to me, “This gate must remain closed; it shall not be opened! And no human is to enter through it because YHWH the God of Israel has entered by it. Therefore it must remain closed. ³ But the prince, and only the prince, may sit in it to eat a meal before YHWH. He shall enter through the vestibule of the gateway and exit by the same way.

Regulations Regarding Temple Service (44:4–31)**(1) Preamble**

⁴ Then he brought me through the north gate to the front of the House. I watched—and look! The glory of YHWH filled the House of YHWH! Then I fell down on my face. ⁵ And YHWH said to me, “Human, pay attention. Look closely and listen carefully to everything I say to you regarding all the ordinances concerning of the House of YHWH and regarding all the instructions concerning it. Pay particular attention to the entrances of the House and all the exits of the sanctuary. ⁶ You shall say to the rebellious family, the family of Israel. . . .

(2) The Problem of the Past: The Violation of Sacred Space

Thus has the Lord YHWH declared: [I have had] enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, ⁷ ushering in foreigners, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of body, allowing them to occupy my sanctuary, and to desecrate my House when you presented food—fat and blood—to me. You have violated my covenant with all your abominations. ⁸ You have failed to guard my sacred rituals, and appointed others to guard my sanctuary for yourselves.

(3) The Solution for the Future: The Protection of Sacred Space

⁹ Thus has the Lord YHWH declared: No foreigner, uncircumcised of heart and uncircumcised of body, may enter my sanctuary—no foreigner at all who is found among the people of Israel. ¹⁰ But the Levites [may enter], those who alienated themselves from me when Israel wandered away from me, who wandered away from me after their pellets of dung, though they must bear their guilt. ¹¹ They may be inside my sanctuary ministering at the gates of the House and ministering for the House. They may be the ones slaughtering the burnt offerings and the sacrifices for the people; and they may attend to them by ministering to them.

¹² However, because they used to minister to them in front of their pellets of dung, which were iniquitous stumbling blocks for the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn an oath against them—the declaration of the Lord YHWH—and they shall bear their guilt. ¹³ But they may not have access to me to perform priestly duties for me, nor have access to any of my sacred areas or the most holy offerings. They shall bear their shame and the abominations that they have perpetrated. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, I will appoint them as House guards, responsible for all its maintenance and all the work that is done inside it.

¹⁵ As for the Levitical priests, the descendants of Zadok, who performed guard duty for my sanctuary while the descendants of Israel were defecting from me, they are the ones who shall have access to me by ministering to me. They shall attend to me by offering me fat and blood—the declaration of the Lord YHWH. ¹⁶ They are the ones who shall enter my sanctuary, and they are the ones who shall have access to my table by ministering to me and perform guard duty for me.

(4) The New Zadokite Order

¹⁷ And when they enter the gates of the inner court they shall be clothed with linen garments; they may not be wearing anything woolen while they minister in the gates of the inner court or on the inside. ¹⁸ Linen turbans shall be on their heads, and linen breeches shall be on their loins. They must not be dressed in any clothing that causes one to perspire. ¹⁹ When they go out to the outer gate to the people, they shall take off the garments in which they have been ministering. They shall leave them in the sacred chambers and put on different clothing to prevent them from transmitting holiness to the people by [contact with] the clothes (Lit., “They shall not sanctify the people with their clothes.”) ²⁰ They must not shave their heads, nor let their hair grow long; they must keep [the hair of] their heads trimmed. ²¹ And no priest may drink wine when he enters the inner court. ²² They may not marry widows or divorcees; they may marry only virgins of truly Israelite descent (*bētūlat mizzera’ bêt yisrā’el*, literally “virgins from the seed of the house of Israel”) or widows who are widows of priests. ²³ They must instruct my people on the distinction between the sacred and the profane, and they must inform them of the difference between what is clean and what is unclean. ²⁴ In the context of formal disputes they shall officiate as judges; they must render judgment according to my [covenant] stipulations (*bēmīšpāṭay*, “by my judgment.”) They must observe my instructions and my ordinances relating to all my appointed festivals, and they must maintain the sanctity of my sabbaths. ²⁵ They must not defile themselves by going near to a dead person. Only in the case of a father or mother, or a son or daughter, or a brother or unmarried sister may they defile themselves. ²⁶ But after he has purified himself, he must count off seven days. ²⁷ And on the day that he enters the sanctuary, to the inner court to minister in the sanctuary, he must present his own sin (*ḥaṭṭā’t*, decontamination, de-sin]) offering. The declaration of the Lord YHWH.

²⁸ They will not have title to any [land] grant; I am their grant. You may not give them a possession in Israel; I am their possession. ²⁹ As for the grain, purification, and reparation offerings, they may eat them. Every devoted thing in Israel shall belong to them. ³⁰ The first of all the first ripened produce of all kinds, and every gift of whatever kind from all your gifts must belong to the priests. And the first of your dough you must give to the priest to cause a blessing to rest over your homes.

³¹ The priests must not eat any bird or animal that has died naturally or been torn by a predator.

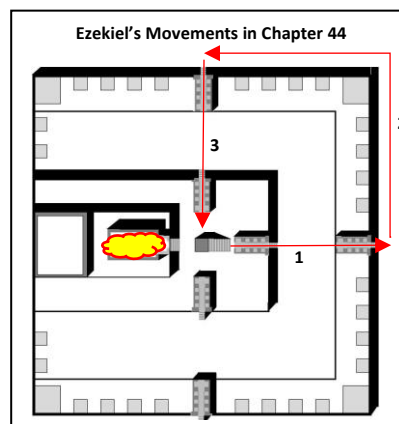
Exposition.

Introduction:

“Holiness, only holiness you shall pursue” (cf. Deut 16:20).

A. Preamble (vv. 4–6a)

1. The tour of the sacred precinct continues and reaches its climax for the prophet.
2. After instinctively and spontaneously falling down on his face, YHWH apparently invites him to stand (cf. 1:28) and begins speaking to him.



3. YHWH’s particular concern was the entrances and exits of the temple compound.
4. YHWH has a new commission for Ezekiel.

B. The Opening Indictment: The Problems with Levites in the Past (vv. 6b–8)

1. The Accusation: Failure to Maintain the Sanctity of the Sanctuary
2. The Consequences: The Defilement of the Sanctuary and Everything Inside

C. The Solution for the Future: The Protection of Sacred Space (vv. 9–16)

1. The Thesis Statement: The Principle of True Worship (v. 9)

“True worship involves reverential acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign in response to his revelation of himself and in accordance with his will.”

2. The Role of the Levites in Restored Temple Vision (vv. 10–14)

A Synopsis of Ezekiel 44:10–11 and 44:12–14		
Heading	Ezekiel 44:10–11	Ezekiel 44:12–14
Introduction	But the Levites [may enter],	
Past Sins of the Levites	those who defected from me when Israel wandered away from me, who wandered away from me after their pellets of dung (<i>gillūlīm</i>),	¹² However, because they used to minister to them in front of their pellets of dung (<i>gillūlīm</i>), which were iniquitous stumbling blocks for the house of Israel,
The Result	though they must bear their guilt.	therefore I have sworn an oath against them—the declaration of the Lord YHWH—and they shall bear their guilt. ¹³ But they may not have access to me to perform priestly duties for me, nor have access to any of my sacred areas or the most holy offerings. They shall bear their shame and the abominations that they have perpetrated.
The New Charge	They may be inside my sanctuary ministering at the gates of the House and ministering for the House. They may be the ones slaughtering the burnt offerings and the sacrifices for the people; and they may attend to them by ministering to them.	¹⁴ Nevertheless, I will appoint them as House guards, responsible for all its maintenance and all the work that is done inside it.

- a. This new ordinance is necessary because in the past the Levites had alienated themselves from YHWH.
- b. YHWH will hold the Levites responsible for their own crimes and for promoting criminality in the household of Israel.
- c. YHWH reaffirms their role as guardians of sacred space (New Charge, vv. 11, 14).
- d. YHWH authorizes the Levites to minister in the temple by assisting the lay worshipers [in the outer court] in their worship.

3. The Role of the Zadokite Priests in Restored Temple Worship (vv. 15–16).

Who was Zadok?

D. The New Zadokite Order

1. Practical Instructions Concerning the Zadokites (vv. 17–27)

- #1 Concerning priestly clothing (vv. 17–19).
- #2 Concerning priestly hair (v. 20).
- #3 Concerning priestly drink (v. 21).
- #4 Concerning priestly marriage (v. 22).
- #5 Concerning priest’s public roles (vv. 23–24).
- #6 Concerning priestly responsibilities toward the deceased (vv. 25–27).
- #7 Concerning the priestly food (44:31).

2. The Special Status of the Zadokites (44:28–30)

- a. **Instead of land, they have YHWH as their grant.**
- b. **They get to eat at YHWH’s table (vv. 29–30).**

Lessons from Ezekiel's Instructions on the Roles of Levites and Priests

1. Understanding ministry from a theological perspective is everybody's business—not just the persons on the pastoral staff or the elders of a church.
2. The call to spiritual leadership over the congregation comes from God.
3. The privilege of ministry in the kingdom of God carries with it the awesome burden of responsibility for the welfare of God's people.
4. The extension of the priesthood to all believers in the New Testament heightens, rather than lessens, the spiritual demands placed upon lay members of the community of faith.
5. In Christ believers find not only the perfect and final sacrifice for their sins, but also the perfect example of priestly responsibility.