

# THE RESTRICTIONS GOVERNING ACCESS TO THE MESSIAH'S TEMPLE: THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE EZEKIEL 44:01–09

## *Introduction*

There is a right way and wrong way to approach and worship God. The right way to approach God is through faith in the promises of God, which included the coming of the promised Messiah and the great gift of the promise land (a symbol of heaven). The right way to worship God is *in spirit* and *in truth* (John 4:24), seeking Him with sincere hearts and active minds.

Down through history the people of Israel had approached and worshipped God in the wrong way. They had not trusted the promise of God, but trusted their own *good works* to make them acceptable to God. Most of them had even offered their worship to false gods, not to the only living and true God.

Remember that Ezekiel is preaching to the exiles in Babylon. They are deeply discouraged, distressed and gripped by a sense of utter hopelessness. Their nation had been destroyed with all their cities, homes, businesses, worship centres, temple and properties. Most of their families and relatives had been killed in the invasion by Babylon. Even if they were set free to return home, in the minds of many there was no reason to return, for nothing was left but bare land and rubble. The messages of Ezekiel 40:1-48:35 are being preached to lift the spirits of the exiles. Perhaps the promise of a new temple, new worship, and a new land someday in the future would encourage the exiles and renew great hope within them.

Having described the temple that God showed him in a vision, the prophet tells them how the Jews will worship in the end time of human history. Restrictions will govern worship in the temple to make absolutely sure that worshippers approach God in a spirit of true faith and humility and honour Him by following His instructions. The new worship in the new temple will be acceptable to God. At long last, the Jews will worship Him in the right way — approaching God through faith in the Messiah, the LORD Jesus Christ. This is, *The New Worship in the Messiah's Kingdom (Part 2): A Picture of the Pure Worship God Demands*, Ezekiel 44:1-46:24.

- I. The restrictions governing access to the Messiah's Temple: a reminder of the importance of church discipline (vv. 44:1-31).
  - II. The sacred district of the promised land: a reminder that the church is holy ground (vv. 45:1-7).
  - III. The establishment of a righteous and just society (vv. 45:8-12).
  - IV. The future offerings: a reminder of the duty to give (vv. 45:13-17).
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- V. The feasts: a reminder that Christ died to save us from sin and death and to give us eternal life (vv. 45:18-25).
- VI. The future worship procedures: a reminder that we must worship exactly as God prescribes (vv. 46:1-15).
- VII. The inheritance of property: a reminder of the believer's inheritance (vv. 46:16-18).
- VIII. The temple's kitchens: a reminder of the need for Christ-centred fellowship (vv. 46:19-24).

### ***Ezekiel 44:01–09 The Restrictions Governing Access to the Messiah's Temple: A Reminder of the Importance of Church Discipline***

Not everyone will be allowed in the Messiah's temple. Precise restrictions will govern who can and cannot enter the sacred ground. Due to the holy presence and glory of God, even some of the Levites (clergy) will be forbidden to serve as priests in the *inner sanctuary*. Access to the Messiah's holy temple will be strictly controlled. No unbeliever nor any other person who continually disobeys God's commandments will be allowed to defile God's holy temple.

1. First, there will be restrictions governing the east gate (vv. 1-3). God's messenger led Ezekiel back to the east gate of the inner court. What now happened was so important that God Himself spoke directly to Ezekiel while the messenger stood in complete silence.

The east gate is to remain closed. It will never be opened, and no one will use it to enter the temple. Why? Because He — the LORD God of Israel — will have returned to the temple through the east gate (v. 2). Remember that in an earlier vision Ezekiel had seen the LORD's glory depart from the temple through the eastern gate (10:1-22; 11:22-25). Now he had just seen God's glory return through the same gate (43:1-4). Keeping the gate permanently closed will reassure God's people that He will never again leave them (34:30-31; 37:28). His presence and glory will remain with them forever.

Although no one will be allowed to enter the east gate, the prince will be allowed to use the *passageway* of the east gate (v. 3). When the prince eats the fellowship meal, he may use the rooms off the passageway to the gate. But he must enter from the outer portico and go out the same way. He is never to go into the inner court (v. 3).

Now, who exactly is *the prince*? Some say that he is the Messiah. But this seems impossible for three reasons:

- => The prince is not a priest. Scripture shows priests ministering to him. However, Scripture after Scripture stresses the priesthood of the Messiah (Rom 8:35; 1 Tim 2:5; 12:24; 1 John 2:1; Heb 2:17; 4:14-15; 5:1-5; 6:19-20; 7:25-27; 8:1, 6; 9:15, 24-28; 10:21-22; Isa 53:12; Zec 14:4-5).

=> The prince presents a sin offering for himself (45:2). The Messiah, the LORD Jesus Christ, is sinless, without blemish (Heb 4:15).

=> The prince will have children. His body will be like that of any other man, whereas the body of the Messiah will be a glorified body.

Other commentators believe that the prince will be David. They suggest that God will resurrect the great king to rule over Israel in the millennial kingdom, and they use Ezekiel 34:24 and 37:24-25 to support their position. However, these two passages most likely refer to the Messiah, the Son of David who is to rule forever.

Who, then, is the prince? Most likely he will be the chief administrative officer of Israel. Even during the Messiah's kingdom, government officials will be needed to manage the cities and nations of the world.

2. Second, the reasons for the restrictions are clearly seen in the experience of Ezekiel (v. 4). God's messenger led the prophet through the north gate to the front of the temple.

As Ezekiel looked at the temple, he suddenly saw the glory of the LORD come down and fill the sanctuary. Immediately, he fell facedown on the ground, humbled before the LORD's holy presence (v. 4). Worshipers must react as Ezekiel did to God's holiness. After God's holy presence fills the temple, all who enter the sacred sanctuary must approach Him with a spirit of humility.

3. Third, four kinds of people will be denied access to the temple (vv. 5-9). Once again the LORD spoke directly to Ezekiel. The prophet had to pay very close attention to what he heard and saw, for those worshipping and ministering in the new temple must not be wicked people or unbelievers.

In the past wicked people and unbelievers had been allowed in the temple. They should not have been, but they were. Their corrupt worship was a clear violation of God's purpose for the temple, and their presence defiled its holiness and purity. For this reason, these groups will be excluded from the temple when the Messiah returns to set up God's kingdom on earth.

a. The wicked — those who rebel against God and engage in detestable, disgusting behaviour — will not be allowed in the Messiah's temple (v. 6). Down through the centuries, the vast majority of Israelites had lived fleshly, carnal lives, engaging in the most vile behaviour imaginable. Note the indictment of God against so many down through the centuries, which is the very reason God will exclude the wicked from the temple in the Messiah's kingdom.

***Rom 1:20-32** For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they*

*became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

- b. The uncircumcised foreigner — all unbelievers who are not circumcised in heart — will be excluded from the Messiah's temple (v. 7). If any unbeliever — native-born or foreigner — was allowed in the temple, he or she would defile God's sanctuary and break the covenant God has made with His people.

***1 Cor 3:16-17** Don't you [plural, meaning all the believers, the church] know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

***Deut 10:16-20** Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. For the LORD your God is God of gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name.*

***Neh 13:4-9** Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests. But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year*

*of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.*

**Jer 4:4** *Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or my wrath will flare up and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it.*

- c. The false minister will also be excluded from the temple when Christ returns to set up His kingdom (v. 8). In the past, some had been allowed to choose the priesthood and other ministries in God's house as a profession, whether they were true believers or not. Also, some priests from other religions — priests who did not accept the LORD as the only true and living God — had been allowed to serve in the temple. But when the Messiah returns He will put a stop to this most damaging practice. All false teachers will be removed from the holy presence of God in the Messiah's temple.

**Jer 2:8** *The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.*

**Jer 5:3** *O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.*

**Jer 14:14** *Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds."*

**Mat 7:15-20** *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."*

**Mat 24:11** *"And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."*

**Mark 13:22** *"For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."*

- d. The unbeliever who has not cut sin out of his life will be excluded from the Messiah's temple (v. 9). This person will not be allowed to enter the presence of God in His holy sanctuary.

**Thought 1.** The lesson for us is clear, even forceful. If we wish to enter God's presence, we must cut sin out of our lives. We must not be stubborn, resisting God, rejecting and refusing to obey His holy commandments. Our *old person, old life* must be cut off. We must cut sin out of our lives.

**Eph 4:24-32** *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Let no foul or polluting language, nor evil word, nor unwholesome or worthless talk [ever] come out of your mouth. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

**Col 3:5-13** *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ■*