

Dr. Leslie Allen, Ezekiel, Lecture 22, Vision of God's Glory Returning, The New Temple in Action, Ezekiel 43:1-46:24

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This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 22, Vision of God's Glory Returning, the New Temple in Action. Ezekiel 43:1-46:24.

We move now to chapters 43 through 46, where we have a great vision of God's glory returning to the New Temple.

And so that the New Temple can swing into operation after God has come back to it. This is a fresh vision marking a new stage in the narrative, and that narrative is a framework of 40 to 48, and we're making our way through it to this new stage. The angelic guide is still leading Ezekiel around, and we have mentioned of him in 43:1 he brought me to the gate, the gate facing east, and then he will feature again in 44:1, he brought me back, and then in verse 4, he brought me by way of the north gate, and then 46:19, he's going to figure again, then he brought me through the entrance, and lastly in verse 21 of 46, then he brought me out to the outer court.

And so, there's the angelic guide still very much doing his good work. But now there's a new focus on God's voice speaking to Ezekiel. This can happen after God has returned to the Temple.

And so here is this new person whereby instead of the angel speaking, God can take over after he has revealed himself by taking up residence in the Temple. And so, we find in 43:6, I heard someone speaking to me out of the Temple. And this is obviously God, and this is what the voice speaks through the end of verse 17.

And then again in verse 18, he said to me, thus says the Lord God. So, this is definitely God speaking here. And then in 44:2, and 5, and 9, and 31, and then 45:1 and 46:1, God is keeping speaking.

And so, there's this new emphasis on God taking part and instructing Ezekiel himself. 41:3 through 44:5 are the long introduction to this stage of the vision. As I say, it reflects a new stage, the return of God's glory, which, in fact, is the reversal of departure from the old Temple in chapters 10 to 11.

In the first edition of the book, you get this polarization of those messages of judgment, and then messages of salvation, and along with that negative visions and then now positive visions. And so, there's this contrast here with chapters 10 to 11,

when God left the old Temple. Until now, as I said before, the Temple of chapters 40 to 42 had been empty.

It was an empty shell. It was unused. It was still needing to be energized by God's presence.

Then, worship can be restored in response to the new presence. But God had to get there first. In 10.19, God's glory is left by way of the outer east gateway of the old Temple.

Interestingly, God's glory comes back the same way in verses 1 and 2a. So we're reminded of those earlier visions, but of course, those have been negative visions—theophanies of judgment.

In chapter 1, to preface, the message of judgment that Ezekiel was to be given to preach in the first half of his ministry. And then later on, the vision of judgment which sealed the message of judgment against the Temple as defiled and now unfit for God's presence. But now we've come to a theophany of salvation.

It's not mentioned, but the whole context cries out to be understood in that sense. Glory is used here in the way it was earlier in the book. It's God's personal presence, but its manifestation is in the form of the mobile throne carried by the living creatures.

And we can tell that because of this noise earlier in the book, this sound of mighty waters, that noise had been the flapping of the angels' wings as they carried that mobile throne away. And it's the same sound that he hears again—and so another revelation.

It's the same, as he says, this is what he means, that grand picture of God coming from heaven on that chariot throne. And then we had that noise of flapping wings in 12.4 which was compared in this way, like the sound of mighty waters. And then the earth was shining with his glory.

This corresponds to the brightness of God's glory that he'd seen in 10.40—something very bright and shining. And so, we bring in these parallels to show it's the same again and yet so different, so different in this new context because it's coming back, and it's not going away anymore.

Overall, at this point, we're meant to see an echo of 1 Kings 8 and verse 11. We're given those verses at the end of Solomon's building and dedication of the temple. What we read there is that at this dedication, when the priest came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priest could not minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

And there is this initial theophany to indicate in a very conspicuous way the presence of God coming into his temple. It's going to be replaced by a quieter presence in the darkness of the holy of holies. But now it's there for all to see, a signal that there was God in all his glory.

So, we get this extreme form of God's presence before it's replaced by the more regular form of God's presence as inhabiting the temple. But here it is again, this temporary special mark of God's presence that was to move into an ongoing and different sort of presence from now on. But there's the sort of inauguration here as there was with the first temple.

And then, at the end of verse 3, I fell on my face, and we have Ezekiel's understandable rejection of shock as we had it in chapter 1 and verse 28. And then God speaks, but before that, in verse 5, as the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, the spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Well, that's the same phrase as we had back in 1 Kings: the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

And then the voice, someone speaking out of the temple, addressing him as mortal and obviously speaking with a divine eye from what's being said here. And the angel doesn't speak anymore as he did in 40 to 22, except apparently once at the end of 46, 24. We do seem to have the angel speaking there, but otherwise it's God's voice giving an explanation and God takes over the explaining, the God who's now returned.

He gives two messages to Ezekiel: one in verses 7 through 9 and the other in verses 10 through 27. First, in verses 7 through 9, God has taken up royal residence in the temple. We have mentioned the word throne significantly.

Mortal, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. And that throne presumably was to be in the Holy of Holies, marking that special presence of God from now on in the temple as before. Then, the place for the soles of my feet used to be the Ark, where the first temple was concerned, but now it seems to be the temple itself, the temple building itself.

There's never mention of the Ark, there's never mention of the Ark in these visionary accounts of the new temple. And the Ark seems to be replaced by a greater presence of God himself and the symbol is not needed now, but instead God himself is there. As I say, this is a royal presence, God's throne is there.

And we recall chapter 20 and verse 33, where God said, I will be king over you. And here was a manifestation of that royalty, which is now fulfilled in the use of this royal

term. As I say, the temple building is evidently regarded as the footstool of God, which, in Solomon's temple, was the role of the Ark.

But there are two changes that differentiate this new temple from the old pre-exilic temple. And it's not the same in these following two ways. First of all, in the second half of verse 7, something that was present in the old temple will be present no more in the new one.

I think the revised English Bible is right in translating monuments raised to the dead kings. Apparently, they were put in the temple courts and they were funeral monuments in honor of dead kings. And, of course, these would be objects which would violate God's holiness, and so no longer would they be there.

Then, the second change, where the old temple was concerned, it had been part of a larger palace complex. It was on the northern side of the palace complex. And as verse 8 says, there's just a wall between them, just a wall between the temple area and the palace buildings.

And here again, this is a no-no. And the new temple is to be in a separate location to safeguard God's holiness. And no longer, it's to prevent the new temple from again being contaminated by the presence of these kings who were common and earthly and might well be tempted to pagan practices.

So, on the safe side, the temple is completely separate from the palace area. we shall read later that the temple is not even in the city of Jerusalem. It's in a special place by itself.

So, even the city is not judged worthy to have the temple in it. But we're going to be warned about that towards the end of the book. Then, there's a second message to Ezekiel, and this is in verses 10 through 27.

The first message is from 10 to 12. Ezekiel is told to tell the exiles about the layout of the new temple and the accent on God's holiness. That will show them how far, and it's going to remind them how far they've fallen short in their worship in the old temple by incorporating pagan practices inside the temple area, as chapters 8 and 9 illustrated.

And we can think, for example, about those massive gatehouses that would have been used for the purpose of screening pilgrims so that there was no wrong living being brought, represented in coming into the temple. Evidently, this had never been done back in chapters 8 and following. But now, there's going to be a more effective control of access to the temple.

Ezekiel is also to pass on the procedures to be followed in the running of the temple, which will be presented in the rest of 43 and 44 through 36. And in verse 12, we're told this is the law of the temple. It's a reference to the procedures that are going to follow.

Verse 12 is sort of a headline for the rest of the vision in 43, 13, through 46. And then, 13 through 17, prepare for the consecration of the altar. Now, the temple can get going.

But the most important aspect was the sacrificial altar. And we shall read of its consecration in 18 to 27. But there are some technical terms used in that account.

And so, in 13 through 17, we're given information which include the technical terms which are going to be reused in 18 through 27. And so here in 13 through 17, the altar gets described in detail. Back in an earlier chapter, there was just a brief mention of that altar in the inner court, that place of sacrificing.

But it was an all-important feature of the temple. It involved the sacrificing of negative sacrifices, we might say, that atone for sin and for the sacrificing of positive sacrifices that represented worship. And this altar was a very large structure.

It was made up of three pieces. It had a base block, which was then surmounted by another smaller block. On top of that was a tall hearth structure for the sacrificial fire.

And there was provision for drainage. There was a gutter all around the base block for the blood of the sacrifices to drain into and to keep the inner court clean and dry from that blood. And we're told that the lowest block was about 28 feet square.

And the altar structure rose above the inner court about 15 feet. And so there were steps up to the hearth on the east side of the altar. And that meant that when the priest sacrificed, he would face the temple building.

And if it had been put on the other side, he would have been facing away from the temple, a great no-no, which, in fact, was a feature of part of that pagan worship of the sun god in an earlier chapter. And so now we come to the third part of God's second message, 18 to 27. This deals with the consecration of the altar.

Common materials had been brought in and used to build the altar, and they needed to be consecrated. Profane materials had to be made holy, so there was a special ceremony.

Before the ceremony, we're told that the altar had two purposes. First, the actual sacrifices were burnt on top of the hearth. But there was another purpose, too: some

of the blood drained from the sacrificial victims was splashed against the side of the altar to make atonement.

The blood played a very important role in atonement in Old Testament religious thinking. That was why you needed that gutter all around the lowest base to drain away that blood splashed against the upper part of the altar. And now comes the ceremony of consecration.

On the first day, the priests are to do two things: smear blood on parts of the altar and then sacrifice a bull as a sin offering to decontaminate from the effects of sin, these common materials that had been used. And on the second day, the sacrifice of a goat and another bull. And then for six more days, verse 26 says, the second day's procedures are to be repeated for six more days.

And then, verse 27, when these days are over, then from the eighth day onwards, it's been consecrated, the priest shall offer upon the altar your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being and will accept you, says the Lord God. Now, your, in verse 27, is actually plural, it refers to the people. Here's the opportunity now for the people to bring their sacrifices.

There were two types of sacrifice. There was the burnt offering, which was holy. The whole animal was sacrificed. It all went up in smoke, we might say, these burnt offerings.

And that was both for atonement and for worship. You could bring a burnt offering for atonement of your sins and you could also bring it for pure worship of God. So, the burnt offering in itself could have one of two purposes.

But apart from that, there were what's called here offerings of well-being. Or the NIV has fellowship offerings. And we're never quite sure how best we can translate this word.

But the essence was that they were partial offerings. Only part of the sacrificial animal was burnt on the altar, and the rest in worship to God. The rest was given back to worshippers to eat as a sacrificial meal with their families.

And so, the use of the altar, it opens up the way for God to accept the worshippers. And I will accept you. I will accept your offerings for sin and I will accept your offerings for worship.

Addressed, as I say, to the people here. We move into chapter 44 and verses 1 through 5. In 4:5, we didn't read it out, but the spirit had taken Ezekiel through the air into the inner court, and there was actually this levitation in this trance that we had read about before. But now, evidently, Ezekiel is taken on his two feet.

He's got to walk instead of being carried. He's taken by the angel to the outer court, to the west side of the east gatehouse where the present vision had, in fact, begun in 43:1. He's taken back there. And as he's there, on the inner side of that east gatehouse, he can see, he can look through the corridor of the gatehouse, and he can see that the gate on the far end is closed.

And this is obviously a significant point. Now, why is the gate closed of the gatehouse where this outer east gatehouse is concerned? We're given two reasons. And one reason is to... We're given two reasons in verses 2 through 4. The first one commemorates the divine entry point into the temple.

God entered the outer court through the east gate. And so, forevermore, ordinary people weren't allowed to go through it. When they came into the outer court, they had to use the two other gates on the north and south sides.

And they could never use that east gate. The gate was kept closed as a reminder. This was the way that God came.

And so, there's a special holiness attached to this particular gatehouse, and we're never going to remember it. But, in actual fact, the king could use it. The king wasn't a priest, but he had a sort of holiness.

He was special, close to God. And so, the king can use it. And here he's called the prince.

And all the way from now on, the king is going to be called the prince. And we had that label sometimes, earlier on, along with king. But it's always prince from now on.

And at some point, we shall have to explain that term. It's in fact a very important term, this term prince. But it becomes a private place.

The other use for this eastern gatehouse is that the people can't walk through it, but the king has a privilege. He can eat his religious meal from the partial sacrifices there. The people would eat their meals in those rooms.

Alongside that perimeter wall on the inside, there would be those rooms all the way around, 30 rooms. And those could be booked. You'd see the receptionist priest, as it were, and you could book up that room and say, could I have it with my family from 11 o'clock, please? Yes, you certainly can.

And so that was where the people would eat their sacrificial meals. But the king had a special place. He could use the east gatehouse, holy as it was, for that particular purpose, for those meals.

And because of his high rank, and because of his special closeness to God, as something relating to that high rank. And then, 4-9 concludes the introduction. Ezekiel is taken back, in verse 4, into the inner court, via the inner north gate.

And he sees again that God's glory is still filling the temple building with its radiance. And we're being reminded, I think, that the temple could only operate, the temple could only function, because God is there, because his living presence is there. That's the secret trigger that allows the temple to operate.

And it's now symbolized in this theophany. His presence was still there. Of course, it would be there, in a lesser but real form, after the theophany, when that glory, in quotes, was gone.

But how was the temple area to be used? We're told this in verse 5. And this is a sort of headline for the rest of 44 through 46. The Lord said to me, Mortal, mark well, look closely, listen attentively, he could have made it clearer: pay attention to all that I shall tell you concerning all the ordinances of the temple and all its laws, all the procedures whereby the temple was to operate. And mark well those who may be admitted to the temple and all those who are to be excluded from the sanctuary.

And so there we are. We have this outlining of what's going to be covered in the material a little bit later on. And there's a focus on access.

Access. Access where the people are concerned as they come in through the outer gates. And we're going to be told that they can only be in the outer court.

They cannot go into the inner court. That's reserved for the priests. So, access of the people and they're going to come in through the outer gates for worship in the outer court.

The priests, they're to use the inner court in fact. It's going to be explained and they're to use the nave of the temple building and its adjacent buildings. But those areas, the special areas are to be kept wholly reserved for priestly access only.

Well, all that is a long introduction to what this section has to say. But then we come to the first main section in 44, 6 through 31. The first of three main sections.

It's about the staffing of the temple area, which is obviously important. First of all, in 6 through 16, we're talking about the temple personnel now.

And this is in two tiers. There are to be Levites and there are to be priests. But first of all something needs to be said.

It's something serious because here's another change from the old temple procedure. This comes in verses 6 through 9. In the old temple, which I said was on the northern end of the palace complex, for convenience the royal guards would man the temple gatehouses. And we read of that in 1 Kings and in chapter 11 we read of it in two places that these guards, they were called called Carites.

No, it's in 2 Kings chapter 11. It's not connected with the inauguration of Solomon's temple. But in the account of a later king, they happen to be mentioned.

2 Kings chapter 11 and verse 4 and then in verse 19. Jehoiada summoned the captains of the Carites and of the guards and had them come to him in the house of the Lord. And these Carites are mentioned again in verse 19.

He took the captains, the Carites, the guards and all the people of the land. Who are the Carites? Well, they came from Caria which was a kingdom in south-west Asia Minor. And they were mercenary troops.

For centuries, evidently, they seem to have been mercenary troops in the royal service. And a little bit like Swiss guards at the Vatican. But the point was that foreign mercenaries were regarded as likely to be more loyal to the king than national soldiers, than nationals.

And nationals were evidently regarded as less trustworthy. And so, guarding the king was a special thing that was reserved for these foreign missionaries and foreign mercenaries. But no, this is a no-no.

Because, in fact, these foreign mercenaries as royal guards, they were also co-opted in guarding the temple area on the north side of the palace complex. And the no-no is that they are Gentiles. They don't belong to God's people.

We can't have that anymore. We've got to have proper priestly personnel who are guards. And so, in 10-14, there is this change.

In fact, the Levites are to replace these foreign mercenaries as guards in the temple area. And they also have the task of slaughtering animals. But in fact, the Levites are not to have a full priestly role of being able to sacrifice animals.

They have a lesser role, lesser temple duties. And in 10-14 there is reference to something which isn't spelled out. There has been some unspecified religious deviation from this group that are called Levites.

And probably reading between the lines, it was connected with operating those local high places with their pagan religious influence. And so instead they are to have more general duties. Be temple guards, yes.

Guards of the gatehouses, yes. And general temple duties. They were to interact with the people and represent their interests, while the priests interacted with God and represented God's interests.

And so, a two-tier system of temple personnel. And then in 15-16, priests, but a special line of priests, the Zadokite line of priests, were to have the privileges of altar duty, sacrificing the animals, and access to the inner court and the nave of the temple. And so, we're told here about temple personnel, especially for the gatehouses, the interacting with the public in the outer court, and then interacting with God in the inner court.

Then, from 17 to 31, we have regulations for priests. Oh my, they had a special role. They were so close to God in their work.

And holy and holiness are keywords that occur four times in verses 17-31. And so it's explained how holiness is to be reflected in a priestly lifestyle. And in 17-19, they're to wear special clothing while they're on duty in the inner court.

And the material their clothes are made of is to be linen. And there's to be no wool. The reason is given to prevent perspiration, which is regarded as unclean here.

Any fluid issuing from the body was regarded as unclean, including perspiration. So, no wool, just linen. And then their hair.

They had to be careful about their hairstyle. It was to be tidy. It wasn't to be shaven off, nor was it to be too long.

And then too, verse 21, they were to drink no wine while they were on duty. In 22, there were marriage rulings that affected the priests. In 23, they were to have a public role as religious teachers instructing the people about what was holy and what was clean in their daily living.

And then in 24, they were to have another public role as judges in religious matters. And they were to officiate in a religious court. And interestingly, in 23 and 24, they were to have contact with the people.

Earlier up on, it's been stressed that they weren't to have contact with the people, but two of their roles did bring them into touch with ordinary people. Then 25 there too, 25 to 27, they were to avoid contact with corpses because they were unclean. But there's a compassionate exemption where the corpses of family members were concerned.

But then, of course, the priest would require purification afterward. And so, a whole series of rulings whereby priestly living was set apart from the way that ordinary people lived. Then, 28 through 30, these verses say that the people are to provide material support for the priests.

The people's tithing gifts to God and some of their partial offerings were passed on to the priests. This section is addressed to Israel as an obligation that God expected for them. For the temple to operate, they had to live day to day.

It was the people's responsibility to see that they were fed properly. In 31, there's a food restriction for the priests. And then in all these ways, the priests are to mirror God's holiness in how they live.

45, 1 through 17, brings us to the second main section of this overall passage. And there's more, really, on the maintenance of priests and Levites, the supply of food for the temple staff. This is developed further.

There are three subsections. First of all, 45, 1 through 8. Now, I have to say something about 45, 1 through 8, because if we had read on to the end of the book by now, we would see that it comes again. 45, 1 to 8a, anyway, not 8b, but 45, 1 to 8a, is a summary of what we're going to read later in 48:8 through 22.

And it's talking about a special section of the land which is to be a reservation and to be set apart. An area set apart in the land of Israel, apart from tribal territories. It had various sections, including this reservation.

It had a holy district, which was a square area, about 8 miles by 6.5 miles, nearly 53 square miles of this holy district. And, no, that wasn't the whole area. But those 53 square miles were part of that area.

And that was set aside for the priests. And then, that was around 17 acres allotted to the temple area. And so the area for the occupation of the priests was alongside the temple area.

And then, alongside that, there was another 53 miles set apart for the Levites. And we're told that in that area there was to be a conglomeration of cities. Cities where the Levites were to live.

And that's interesting because in Numbers 35, the Levites had cities all through the land. Each tribal area had cities where the Levites lived before they reported for their religious duties on a rota. Cities were set aside for them throughout the land.

But here, of course, they're part of the temple personnel. They're consecrated, so they're put in one area. So, all those old cities are now banded together in one group where the Levites are concerned.

And then, we talked about that priestly land. Two areas of priestly land around the temple area. And that was to serve as pastures for cattle and flocks.

And so, to help to support their families. But there were two other areas on the east and west of this reservation. And these areas were crown property.

It was lands occupied by the king and his servants and his family. But before we do that, in fact, in the order, we come to the city. Because the city of Jerusalem was included in the reservation.

It was apart from the temple area. It was apart from those religious areas allocated to the occupation of priests and Levites. But it was a city area of about 26.5 square miles.

The city and adjoining land. And this was open to Israelites of every tribe. It was a microcosm of the nation, in fact.

Most tribal members would choose to live in their own tribal areas. But you could come and live in the city. And that, too, is regarded as holy in a certain sense.

But it's separate from the temple. And we should get this notion of the holiness of the city of Jerusalem pinpointed right at the end of the book in chapter 48. But then, as I was saying, you had these two other areas on either side of this big reservation.

And that was allotted to the king. And the implication is he was given plenty of land. He was given plenty of land because we're going to be told about the tribal areas and when you count up the size of the crown lands on either side of the holy parts of the reservation, about two-thirds of a tribal area was given over to the king as his own crown property.

And so, he had plenty of land for himself. And there's a little hint here that he's not to take other people's land which was such a problem in pre-exilic times. And we remember the classic side of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21 and how Queen Jezebel managed to get it assigned to Ahab as crown property.

And so, what we're told about the reservation here, really the point is to talk about this large area given to the king with a warning that yes, your majesty, you have plenty of land, so there's no excuse for you to take any land that belongs to your people. And so, 8b is added to the material from chapter 48 which brings this out. My princes shall no longer oppress my people.

They shall let the house of Israel have the land according to their tribes. So that's why this 48 material is being put back in 45. And then in verse 9, there's a fresh message from God which is rhetorically addressed to the pre-exilic kings.

Thus says the Lord God, enough, O princes of Israel, put away violence and oppression and do what is just and right. Cease your evictions of my people and grab their land for yourself. And so, this had been a very real threat, and the exiles had vivid memories of this happening down the years, and so there's this assurance it's not going to happen again.

And those old ideals of justice and righteousness are going to come true where royal rule is concerned. And so, the king has this territory. There's also a little focus on holiness.

The king and the family, in a sense, were holy people at a lesser level than the temple personnel, but they were holy people and belonged on this reservation. But mainly, it's this economic concern. Economic stability would be upset if the king was always grabbing territory.

People needed land to live and support themselves and their families and to thrive in life. If they didn't have that, they wouldn't be able to support the temple personnel. So, this is the real reason for this.

This economic stability is necessary so that the economy can run well enough for the people to have enough money and enough supplies in order to pass on some to the temple personnel, to God, which then was passed on to the temple personnel so that they could have enough in turn. But for the people to have enough resources, they need to get rid of this terrible temptation that the kings seem to have, very much so. And then 45, 9 to 12, we already looked at 9, but this is the second part of the second main section, and it's more on economic justice and implicitly to safeguard sufficient giving to the temple.

And so, this rhetorical address of those old pre-exilic kings, and this is going to happen no more. And then 10 to 12, a more general statement about weights and measures. And once again, it's for economic stability.

If there are unequal weights and measures, if you never know which shop you go to, if it's going to be the same standard as it was in the other shop, then that's chaotic. But there has to be fairness. This is part of the fairness that must prevail in Israel.

Again, the ultimate reason is that the people are not defrauded, and once again, they will have sufficient resources to fund the temple. And in 10 to 16, you shall have honest balances. This plural is now addressed to the people at large.

And so a responsibility on merchants among the people to have honest balances and measures and so on. And then in 13 to 17, another way in which the temple personnel are to be supplied and there are to be enough sacrifices to keep the temple going, sacrifices and offerings, there was to be a temple tax. And this seems to be in addition to the regular tithing.

And where cereal crops were concerned, one-sixtieth, it works out was to be handed over to the temple. And then, in the case of oil, offerings were used in oil, and cereal was used in the cereal offerings. Each farmer handed over one percent of the oil crop to the temple.

And then half a percent in the case of sheep and goats. And so, in this way, there were going to be enough sacrifices and offerings of different kinds, and also the temple personnel could be maintained in those parts that were passed on to the priests and Levites. And then, from 16 to 17, the king was obliged to make special contributions at festival times and other holy days.

He was to pay a lot of money to see that those went well, and he was to make a lot of material provision. When festivals and holy days came up on the calendar, the king had to cough up from the royal treasury. Noblesse oblige.

But let's step aside and think about this word prince, which in 40 to 48 is the only word used of the king. It's used of the king, who's perceived as ruling the people after the return from exile. In chapter 34, verses 23 and 24, we're told that this prince was to be of Davidic descent.

And then, from 33 to 23, he's also called a shepherd, which has a royal connotation, as we said earlier. And so that word shepherd we saw has got strong royal associations in both Israel and the ancient Near East. And then 37 to 25, this prince is also mentioned, mentioned again as being of Davidic descent, but he's also called king in 37:22 and 24.

So, really, it's the equivalent of king, but it's got far different associations. And for us, it's a misleading word. So far as I know, the Old Testament versions all use the word prince.

But for us, we think of royalty. And in the United Kingdom, we think of Prince Charles, Prince Andrew, Prince William, Prince Harry. Yes, part of the royal family.

But the prince has no royal associations where the Hebrew word is concerned. The Hebrew word means an elevated person, somebody who's raised above the rest. And so a leader, either a tribal leader or a national leader, can be called by this term, which is rendered here, prince.

So, it's not necessarily a royal term here. In Ezekiel, it is, but it's not necessarily royal. But in 40 to 48, it's very firmly said, it's the prince, the prince, the prince.

And Ezekiel refrains from using the word king, even though he mixed up the terms in chapter 37. In my commentary, I translated the head of state. Head of state is a much more neutral term than king.

And I think this reflects a political situation and political thinking among the exiles. They were fed up with kings. We don't want kings anymore, thank you very much.

We've suffered at their hands. We are disillusioned with the monarchical form of government. And they sound rather like those British colonists in America at a certain point in history.

And in the case of the exiles, there were good reasons. The kingship that they'd experienced or heard of from earlier history had been totalitarian and self-seeking. They had bad leaders and no respect for what the people needed.

They didn't rule properly at all, except for a few exceptions. And they made unwise political decisions and they tolerated or encouraged religious deviations from the orthodox faith. I think this was very prevalent among the exiles.

And they were Republicans, republicans, or Democrats. They were staunch, and they were not monarchists. And Ezekiel is caught in a trap, in a sense.

He has a pastoral sensitivity. He knows if he talks about the king, people won't be so willing to listen to him. And so, head of state, head of state, president if you like, oh yes, we'll use this term, don't be worried.

And so, he makes it clear there's a differentiation between this new head of state and the bad ones that had gone before. And there's a pastoral sensitivity that he's avoiding completely the word king as politically out of favor and offensive. But he's caught in a trap because he still needs to be loyal to the prophetic tradition maintained by earlier prophets of a future king of David's line.

And so, in these chapters, we've had this emphasis on the negative features of pre-exilic monarchy which are going to be brought to an end. And the leader is presented, this head of state is presented as a sort of a constitutional monarch with the people's needs at heart. And so, Ezekiel avoids the offensive word.

And he's trying to do justice to two opposing factors. The exile's reasonable antagonism. They're fed up with monarchy on the one hand.

On the other hand, he has to persevere in those prophetic hopes. And so, he had a difficult balancing act to achieve. And this is how he handles it here.

There are various things said about this prince or head of state in 40-48, but most of them, most of what's said is carefully related to the temple. The main object of attention in 40-48 is the temple. That is the major focus.

And so, temple concerns, as they affect the king, the king gets brought into them. But, there's a lot that's not said about this future kingship. There's an emphasis just on the temple.

And so, it doesn't leave much room for describing his political powers. And so, we have a rather limited representation of the king, necessarily, because of this temple emphasis. 45:18 through 46:15 brings us to the third and last main section.

This is about ritual offerings. It has two parts: 45:18 through 25 and 46:1 through 15.

First of all, 18:25 runs through the religious calendar. The celebrations involving sacrifices and offerings and the use of sacrificial blood. And there are two aspects of the religious calendar that's brought out here.

First of all, in 18:20, a spring religious event. This was an annual rite of decontamination involving the inner court and the temple. The blood of the sin offering was used to decontaminate the temple from Israel's sins, which could have had a defiling effect on the sanctuary.

Now, this is interesting. In Leviticus, where the festival, where the holy days are mentioned at length, we have not a spring event, but a fall event, the Day of Atonement, which has the same purpose as this spring event, this annual rite of decontamination. But this was to take place in the spring.

And why there's this switch, why there's no fall Day of Atonement, but this spring corresponding event, we're not told. And there's again a question mark in verses 21 through 45. We're told about the festivals.

First of all, the combined festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread, and then the Feast of Tabernacles. And we say, Ah, Ezekiel, you've left out Pentecost. We've only got two of the regular festivals, annual festivals, and we don't know why Pentecost wasn't mentioned.

But we're told again that the king was obliged to provide offerings of various kinds from his own pocket for the festivals. Noblesse oblige, once more. And then the second thing that needs to be said is 46:1 through 18, in fact, 46:1 through 15, and then we'll look at 16 to 18 separately.

We have other religious procedures that apply to the temple area that hadn't been mentioned before. First of all, 1 to 12, access to the temple area. First of all, in 1 to 3, and then in 4 to 7, we're told that that's where the people have access.

But first of all, in 1 to 3, yes, 1 to 3, the inner east gatehouse is to be kept closed, like the outer east gatehouse. We've been told that before. And so, these east gatehouses, nobody is to walk through them.

They're to be kept closed. They're especially holy as a memorial, a commemoration, that that was the way God came in through the temple in all his glory. But there's an exception made for the king on Sabbath days and New Moon days, where the inner gatehouse was concerned.

He has a special privilege, the privilege of standing in the inner gatehouse at the inner end to watch the priests who are sacrificing his particular offerings at the altar. And when he did this, he was also to bow down in worship, and that's the Muslim-like prostration of getting down on your knees and putting your head to the ground. He was to do that, this act of worship, as he watched his sacrifices being performed at the altar.

But then, too, there was another sort of special access that related to the east gatehouse. On those days, on Sabbath and New Moons, the people could stand on the outer side of the inner gatehouse, and so in the outer court still, and they could look through the open gates. The gates would be opened to watch the altar ceremony where their offerings were being concerned.

And perhaps on a loudspeaker, Mr. Jones and his family, we're ready to offer your sacrifices. Mr. Jones and his family could take their place and look through and above the steps, through the corridor, they could see that high altar, and they could see Mr. Jones and family, their sacrifice taking place. And so that was a privilege, and then they, too, would prostrate themselves in worship.

Then verses 4 to 7 specify the sacrificial offerings the king was obliged to make on Sabbath days and New Moon days, and these are the offerings of verse 2, but elaborated in greater detail. The king had work to do, he had money to fork out from his own lands. And then, in verses 9 to 10, the people are to have access to the inner court, sorry, to the outer court.

They were to come in through the north and south outer gates, and they could worship in the outer court. But there was a special crowd control. This could get out of control, and a lot of people involved.

And it's organized in a very orderly way. The people are to form two orderly streams, and they can come in through the outer north gate and exit through the south gate, or they can come in at the south side, through the south outer gate, and leave on the north side. They can't do a U-turn.

They can't come on one side and go out on that same side. And so, there's this traffic control, this human traffic control, a very realistic detail. And so, this would help prevent a disorderly traffic jam of the people milling about in this outer court and making a mess of things, which would be rather degrading to the whole process.

And then verse 11 specifies the serial offerings that they're to bring, the proper amounts that the people are to bring. And then, in verse 12, we come back to the king. He's a VIP, this king, and he's got a rank of holiness, and so he's got another privilege, too.

And here in verse 12, the king has the privilege of access to the inner east gate again, apart from those special days of Sabbath and new moon days, whenever he brought voluntary offerings. In Israel, you had obligatory offerings under certain circumstances, but then you could give God an extra, and you can say, I'm giving it because I want to give it. And you could bring voluntary offerings, and nobody was making you do it, but you just wanted to do it.

You could bring those offerings as a partial sacrifice and get something back that you could cook and eat for your meal with your family as a sacrificial meal in those rooms where the people were concerned. Or you could bring a total offering, a burnt offering. I'm giving it all to you, God.

I don't want anything back for a sacred meal. And that was obviously a higher thing than just giving a partial sacrifice. But they could come.

They could come to that eastern gatehouse once more, and they could watch the altar ritual being carried out. Whenever they brought voluntary offerings, they had the same privilege that other people did when they brought their obligatory offerings. Then, from 13 to 15, the daily offerings are specified in Numbers and Exodus.

Numbers 28, Exodus 29, you get accounts of the daily offerings. They were morning and evening, every morning and evening. Here's another little variation here in Ezekiel.

Only morning sacrifice is mentioned, and we don't know why the evening ones weren't. In 13 and 14, the NRSV has to provide a lamb and a grain offering, but I think the NIV is preferable. It's a better reading to have you addressed to the prophet.

The prophet is being spoken to in the first instance as an example of God's people. All right, the NIV gets it right. I don't think the NRSV does.

And then 16 to 18, we are moving on now. And this is introduced. It's rather special because it's introduced with the formula of divine speech, the messenger formula, thus says the Lord God.

And so that draws attention to it. And this is about the king. And it's about the king's land.

And so, really, it's a footnote to 45:8-9, which was also dealing with a similar topic. And it clarifies this issue of the king's land rights. There were things that the king could do with his land, and there were things he couldn't do.

And we've had outlined before that he wasn't to take other people's land. The people had constitutional rights to their particular land holdings and the king was not to take them away. But here's another issue.

This is a case of the king giving some of his own lands to the staff member, one of the staff members at court that he especially liked, who'd done something particularly well, and he would reward him with the land. Now this raises a complication. And so the ruling is, yes, that particular courtier, he can have that land, but only on a temporary basis.

He and his family can only have ownership of that land until the 50th day of Jubilee, which Leviticus 15 talks about. And then it goes back to the royal family. And so, carefully spelled out, this land holdings.

Royal property, at those ends of that reservation, was really royal property. And for a time, it could be leased, as it were, for 50 years or so to the Jubilee year, but then it had to go back to the king. And so, this is, once again, it's this question of land rights which is being spelled out here.

Overall, this section is put here in a strange place. We'd expect it after 48 to 40, 45 verses 8 to 9, but instead it's put at the end of religious procedures about the king. But I don't know why it's put in this particular place.

Now, a very interesting fact, looking back as Christians, this royal figure has a royal family. He has a royal family because it also mentions another example, the king could give some of his property to his sons. And they can keep that property because they're royal in themselves, they're the royal family.

But there's this interesting factor that there's no concept of a single Messianic figure here. There's a royal dynasty in view after the exile, from this viewpoint at least. And it may be earlier in Ezekiel that the king mentioned there would be the renewal, the first renewal of the Davidic dynasty.

I don't know. In 46, 19 to 24, we have the conclusion to that visionary narrative that began in chapter 43. Again, it's brass tacks, practical details here, as have come out at various points.

And there were outdoor kitchens. And there were two sets of outdoor kitchens. And there was one priestly kitchen, which was used for cooking and baking the parts of the sacrifices and other offerings that the priests had a right to eat.

This was located in an extension to the inner court on the north side of the temple area. But apart from that, there were four other kitchens in the outer court. And these were for the people.

And these kitchens were run by the Levites as part of their temple duties. They would be the cooks. And the people would bring what would be handed back to them of the sacrificial offerings that they got back for the sacrificial meal.

They would take them to the Levites in the kitchens. These kitchens were located at the four corners of the outer court. There were kitchen areas where the food would be cooked on behalf of individual worshippers.

And then they could go back to the particular room that they booked and enjoy their food there. And it was evidently surrounded by a low wall in each case—these four kitchens at the four corners of the outer court.

Now, one thing we have to notice, it's come before, but let's notice it at this point. Reference to the sin offering and reference to the guilt offering in verse 20. The sin offering was for decontaminating the effect of sin where worshippers were concerned.

And then there was the guilt offering, which related to the wrong use of property, and some kind of atonement was necessary. Well, this is a surprise. After what we've read earlier in Ezekiel, do you remember chapters 11 and 36? The people after the exile are going to be given a new spirit and God's spirit to guarantee obedience to the covenant obligations.

And so, it comes over as unexplained, as surprising, that there's still an envisaging of sin offerings and guilt offerings here. And all one could say, at least we can say, that there's a similar tension in the New Testament. That we Christians are given the gift of the Holy Spirit and yet we still need challenges not to sin.

And there are calls to Christians to repent after sinning. And so, it's envisaged too that Christians will sin even though they have the gift of the Holy Spirit. And there's some sort of parallel here after the exile in mention of a sin offering and a guilt offering.

Well, overall, what we find in these chapters is an outworking of divine holiness in the temple area in the light of God's renewed presence. That holy God is coming in and in the most holy place. And so all around there must be evidence in the procedures and the way things are carried out so that there's a corresponding holiness where the priests and the people, priests and Levites are concerned.

And so, we have to remember that the temple is really doing two things. It's an essential opportunity for God and the people to interact. And yet there's a definite separation necessary between these two unequal covenant partners, God and people.

And so, what we're being told is wrestling. Public only in the outer court. Priests in the inner court.

No one in the Holy of Holies and so on. And so, there are issues of space and personnel and of times to maintain and secure, restore holiness. Sacrificial meat and sacrificial blood was necessary to deal with contamination to the temple caused by the people.

Daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rites represented an ever-flowing stream of worship. And then too we've seen that practical attention needed to be given, rather mundane attention, to the support of the temple staff. That this had ramifications beyond the temple in requiring an economically sound country that could do more than support its own citizens and had enough over to give to the temple so the temple could be maintained and the temple personnel could be materially supported.

The issue of kingship, so traditional for Israel and yet so flawed in the past, had to be faced anew with guidelines that balanced high privilege with necessary responsibility and with an eye open to the dislike that the exiles had of kingship in general by now. So, in principle, 42 through 46 are raising practical issues that are still relevant for churches, we might say. Worship is done decently and in order, constant reconciliation of an imperfect people, adequate backup systems of administration and economic support, and these are all issues that still confront God's people.

And it's fascinating that Ezekiel in his visions, these are issues that arise for the people of God in the future as in the past. Next time we shall be studying chapters 47 and 48.

This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 22, Vision of God's Glory Returning, the New Temple in Action. Ezekiel 43.1-46.24.