# Haftarah Helper 5781: Emor

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# Ezekiel 44:15-31

Paralleling the Parashah's commands relating to Aaron and his sons, the Haftarah delves into the role of the priests in a rebuilt Temple. This passage is part of the concluding chapters of Ezekiel which detail a rebuilt Temple and its procedures.¹ In contrast with the First Temple's corrupt end, the new Temple will stand as a bastion of justice, holiness, and purity. Most priestly families, who served idols during the First Temple, will be banished from priestly roles. Reprising their role during King David's era, only the line of Tzadok, whose name is synonymous with righteousness, will officiate as priests at the Temple and among the people. The Haftarah details their duty to follow the Parashah's priestly laws, and to serve as teachers and judges for the nation. In return, they are especially close to God, and the people sustain them from their sacrifices, tithes, and first fruits.

Some of these laws, such as a prohibition for a priest to marry an Israelite's widow (Ezek. 44:22), differ from the Torah's (Lev. 21:7). This led to Talmudic uncertainty about whether Ezekiel should be included in the Bible. Enigmatically, the Talmud recounts that these legal differences were resolved - but without stating the actual resolutions (see Connections below for one such resolution):

Shabbat 13b	שבת י"ג ב
Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: "Truly, that man is remembered for the good, and his name is Ḥananya ben Ḥizkiya, as if not for him, the book of Ezekiel would have been buried [and excluded from the Bible] since [some of] its words contradict the words of the Torah. What did [Ḥananya ben Ḥizkiya] do? They brought him three hundred jugs of oil [for light and food], and he sat in the upper story [of a building] and homiletically resolved the contradictions.	אָמֵר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמֵר רַב: בְּרַם זָכוּר אותוֹ הָאִישׁ לַטוֹב וַחֲנַנְיָה בֶּן חִזְּקִיֶּה שְׁמוֹ, שֵׁאִלְמָלֵא הוּא נִנְנֵז מַפֶּר יְחָזְקֵאל, שָׁהָיוּ דְּבָרָיוּ סוֹתְרִין דִּבְרֵי תוֹרָה. מֶה עַשָּׂה? –ָּהֶעֲלוּ לוֹ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַּרְבֵי שֶׁמֶן, וְיָשֵׁב בַּעֲלִיָּיה וּדְרָשֵׁן.

Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak), offers a non-Talmudic explanation of these stringencies; i.e, they reflect an additional level of sanctity befitting a Temple holier than the one it replaced.<sup>2</sup>

#### Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 15-16: Only priests descended from Tzadok, who did not serve idols during the 1st Temple era, will serve God in the Temple.

Ezekiel 44:15	יחזקאל מ"ד:ט"ו
"The priestly Levites, descendants of Tzadok, who kept My sanctuary's charge while the children of Israel strayed from Me, they shall come near to me to minister to me. They shall stand before Me to offer to me fat and blood," says the Lord God.	וֹדָם נָאָם אֲדֹנֵי ה': לְשֵׁרְתִּנִיוֹעָמְדָּוּ לְפָנַי לְהַקְּרִיב לִי חֵלֶב בְּנֵי־ִישִּׁרָאֵל מֵעָלֵי הָפָּהִיקְרְבִּוּ אָלֵי לְשֵּׁרְתִּנִיוֹעָמְדָּוּ לְפָנַי לְהַקְרִבּוּ אָלֵי הַבְּבְּיִב לִי חֲלֶבִי הַבְּבָּיִם הַלְּוִיּם בְּנֵי צָּדָּוֹק אֲשֶׁׁר שָׁמְרׁוּ

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Haftarot for <u>Parshat HaChodesh</u> and <u>Tetzaveh</u> are also selections from this closing section of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a priest, perhaps partly accounting for his focus on Temple matters.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Radak on 44:22.

#### Verses 17-22: Laws regulating priestly garments, hair, wine consumption, and marriage.

Ezekiel 44:17	יחזקאל מ"ד:י"ז
It shall be that upon their entering the inner court's gates, they shall wear linen garments. Wool shall not come upon them during their ministrations at the inner court's gates or within.	בְּשֵׁׁאֲבֵרִי הָחָאֵר הַפְּּנִימִית וָבָיְתָה הַפְּנִילִּית בִּנְדֵי בִּשְׁׁתִּים יִלְבָּשׁׁוּ הַפְּנִילִּית בִּנְדֵי פִשְׁתִּים יִלְבָּשׁוּ הָבִּינִאָם אֶל־שַׁאֲבֵר

#### Verses 23-24: The priests will teach and judge God's people, and ensure the sanctity of holy days.

Ezekiel 44:23	יחזקאל מ"ד:כ"ג
They shall instruct My people [to distinguish] between the sacred and the ordinary, and inform them [to distinguish] between the defiled and the pure.	וּבֵּין־טָמֵא לְטָהָוֹר יוֹדִעֻם: וְאֶת־עַמָּייוֹרְוּ בֵּיןקֹדֶשׁ לְחֻׁל

### Verses 25-273: Laws governing priestly defilement due to contact with corpses.

Ezekiel 44:25	יחזקאל מ"ד:כ"ה
[The priest] shall come near no dead person to defile themselves - except they shall defile themselves for [their own] father, mother, son, daughter, brother, or for [their] never-married sister.	וּלְאָחָוִת אֲשֶׁר-לִאִּרהָיְתָהלְאָישׁ יִמַּמָאוּ: אָם-לְאָב וּלְאָם וּלְבֵּן וּלְבַׁת לְאָּח וֹאֶל-מֵת אָדָם לְא יָבִוּא לְטַמְאֵה בִּי

# Verses 28-31: Unlike other Israelites, priests do not have ancestral property. God is their inheritance, providing for them by commanding Israelites to sustain them with sacrificial, agricultural, and other gifts.

Ezekiel 44:30	יחזקאל מ"ד:ל
And the first of all the firstfruits of all things, and every heave-offering of all your heave offerings, shall belong to the priests: you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause a blessing to rest on your house.	אָק-בּּינֵלבּ: מֹפֵּק שְׁרנּמִּוִנִיכֶּם לַפַּנְּוֹלְטָנִים בְּּרָכָּט וֹנִאְשִּׁית בּּרַבָּה וְרֵאִשִּׁית בּּל-בּפִּוּרִי כִּל וְכָּל-שִּׁרַנִּמַת פָּּל

# **Connections**

A Talmudic approach to understanding the Haftarah's prohibition for priests to marry an Israelite widow; (see introduction, above.)

Kiddushin 78a-b	קידושין ע"ח א-ב
Rav Nahman said to Rava: The first clause [of Ezek. 44:22] pertains to a High Priest [who is prohibited from marrying a widow], and [its] latter clause pertains to a common priest [who may marry a widow]. Rava said to him: Yes[, I agree].	אמר ליה רב נחמן לרבא האי קרא רישא בכהן גדול וסיפא בכהן הדיוט אמר ליה אין

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>According to Rashi, verse 27 constitutes a separate, distinct command. We follow Radak, who groups it with the previous two verses.