

Emor: Ezekiel 44:15-31



Paralleling the Parashah's commands relating to Aaron and his sons, the Haftarah delves into the priests' role 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 acts, effectively becoming ordinary Levites. 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 the duty of these priests to follow the Parashah's priestly laws, and to serve as teachers, judges, and leaders of Shabbat and holiday observance for the nation. The notable differences between these laws and similar Torah laws are addressed below, in [Haftarah and Halachah](#). Since they have no ancestral property to sustain themselves, the people sustain them from their sacrifices, tithes, and first fruits.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 44:15-16: 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.	והכהנים הלויים בני צדוק אשר שמרו את-משמרת מקדשי בתעויות בני-ישראל מעלי תמה יקרבו אלי לשרתני ועמדו לפני להקריב לי חלב ודם נאם אדני ה':

Verses 44:17-22: In the Temple, these priests must don linen garments, and leave them in the Temple before joining the people. When serving at the Temple, they may not drink wine. Their hair must be of moderate length, and they must follow strict marriage rules (see [Haftarah and Halachah](#)).

Ezekiel 44:22	יחזקאל מ"ד:כ"ב
They shall not take a widow or a divorced woman for wives, but they shall [marry] virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow who is a priest's widow.	ואלמנה וגרושה לא-יקחו להם לנשים כי אם-בתולת מצרע בית ישראל והאלמנה אשר תקנה אלמנה מכהן יקח

Verses 44:23-24: These priests will teach the people about holiness and ritual sanctity, and adjudicate disputes according to God's law. They will preserve and sanctify God's holy days.

Ezekiel 44:23	יחזקאל מ"ד:כ"ג
They shall instruct My people [distinguishing] between the sacred and the ordinary, and inform them [to distinguish] between the defiled and the pure.	ואת-עמי יורו בין קדש להל ובין-טמא לטהור יודעם:

¹ The Haftarat for [Parshat HaChodesh](#) and [Tetzaveh](#) are also selections from this closing section of Ezekiel, chapters 40-48. Ezekiel was a priest, perhaps partly accounting for his focus on Temple matters.

Verses 44:25-27: These priests may not defile themselves by contact with the dead, except for certain relatives. A defiled priest must wait seven days after completing the usual seven-day purification process and then give a sin offering for his defilement.²

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.	וְאֵל־מֵת אָדָם לֹא יִבֹּא לְטַמְּאָהּ כִּי אִם־לְאָב וְלְאִם וּלְבֵן וּלְבַת לְאִחַ וּלְאֶחָיו אֲשֶׁר־לֹא־הָיְתָה לְאִישׁ יִטְמָאוּ:

Verses 44:28-31: Priests do not have ancestral property to sustain themselves as Israelites do. God provides for them by commanding Israelites to give them sacrificial, agricultural, and other gifts. They must observe kashrut.

Ezekiel 44:30	יחזקאל מ"ד:ל
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 give the first of your dough to the priest, to cause a blessing to rest on your house.	וְרֵאשִׁית כָּל־בְּפוּרֵי כָל־זְכוּל־תְּרוּמַת כָּל מִכְלֵי תְרוּמוֹתֵיכֶם לַכֹּהֲנִים יִהְיֶה וְרֵאשִׁית עֲרֹסוֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ לַכֹּהֵן לְהַגִּישׁ בְּרֵכָה אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ:

Haftarah and Halachah

Some of the Haftarah's laws, such as its prohibition for a priest to marry an Israelite's widow (verse 22), differ from the Torah's (Lev. 21:7). These discrepancies led to Talmudic uncertainty about **whether the book of Ezekiel should be included in the Bible**. Enigmatically, the Talmud recounts that these legal differences were resolved:

Shabbat 13b	שבת י"ג ב
Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: "Truly, that man is remembered for the good, and his name is Hananya ben Hizkiya, as if not for him, the book of Ezekiel would have been buried [and excluded from the Bible] since [some of] its words contradicted the Torah's words. What did [Hananya ben Hizkiya] do? They brought him three hundred jugs of oil, and he sat in the upper story [of a building] and homiletically resolved the contradictions.	אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: בְּרַם זְכוּר אוֹתוֹ הָאִישׁ לְטוֹב וְחֲנֻנְיָה בֶן חִזְקִיָּה שָׁמוֹ, שְׂאֵלְמַלְאָה הוּא נִגְנְזוּ סֵפֶר יְחִזְקְאֵל, שֶׁהָיוּ דְבָרָיו סוֹתְרִין דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה. מָה עָשָׂה? — הֶעֱלֹו לוֹ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת גְּרָבֵי שֶׁמֶן, וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּעֻלְיָה וּדְרָשׁוּ.

Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak) offers an overall explanation of Ezekiel's unusual rulings; i.e, they reflect an **additional level of sanctity** befitting a Temple holier than the one it replaced.³

The Talmud resolves these contradictions in other ways. Here is its interpretation of the Haftarah's prohibition for priests to marry an Israelite widow:

Kiddushin 78a-b	קידושין ע"ה 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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² The header reflects the simple reading of verses 26-27; the seven-day purification process is described in Numbers 19. Probably because this conflicts with Torah law (see **Haftarah and Halachah**), the Talmud (Moed Katan 15b-16a) identifies the seven days with the seven-day purification process itself, and the sacrifice to refer to other cases.

³ See Radak on 44:22 and elsewhere.