

Haftarah Emor “Hungering and Thirsting”

Ezekiel 44:15-31

This week’s Torah reading, *Emor* (Leviticus 21:1-24:23), begins to focus on the priestly functions of the Levites. Previously in *Kedoshim* (Leviticus 19:1-20:27) we saw a very high emphasis placed upon holiness, with the instructions to maintain a high degree of personal purity and separation from the other nations being a critical requirement of the emerging nation of Israel. This week’s Torah teaching deals specifically with how a Levitical priest is to handle the deceased,² as well as properly prepare and manage various offerings and sacrifices.³ Additionally, the specifics of the *moedim* or appointed times of the Lord are articulated.⁴ It becomes incumbent upon the priesthood to lead the people of Israel in proper praise and worship, not only around the sacrificial altar, but also during the weekly Sabbaths and festivals of the Lord.

Interestingly, when the Jewish Sages were searching for a complimentary Haftarah reading for *Emor*, they chose a passage from the historically-controversial Book of Ezekiel. What can make Ezekiel’s prophecies so contentious are *supposed* changes seen in the priesthood at a future Temple structure (Ezekiel chs. 40-48). Some of what Ezekiel prophesied is different from what had originally been communicated by Moses. Hence, the debate among the Rabbis was not resolved until the respected work of Hanina ben Hezekiah (b.*Shabbat* 13b). For people who believe in an ongoing, progressive plan of God’s salvation history—the fact that a future Temple will have a slightly different priesthood—should not be too disturbing. When we consider our Haftarah passage from Ezekiel 44, we can note that according to Ezekiel there will be some modifications among the ministering priesthood when this Temple is built. What we specifically see is a sifting from priests from the larger line or Aaron, to the more specific line of Zadok:

“But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood,’ declares the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 44:15).

Apparently, due to the allegiance of Zadok to King David—and specifically to his chosen son Solomon during the critical time when Absalom and Adonijah were attempting to usurp or capture the throne of Israel—unlike his contemporary priest Abiathar, he remained loyal. It was at this season of kingship transition (2 Samuel chs. 15-20) that Zadok never wavered in his absolute loyalty to David and Solomon as the chosen kings of Israel. The everlasting benefits of this loyalty manifested themselves with the Prophet Ezekiel foretelling that in the future Temple, the ministering priests will come from the line of the Zadok priesthood.

However, as you continue to read our passage from Ezekiel 44, please note that many of the responsibilities and obligations of the Zadokites are the same as those originally bestowed upon the broader Aaronic priesthood. As we have been studying about the requirement for holiness as a part of emulating God (Leviticus 20:26), to know the clean

² Leviticus 21:11; 22:4.

³ Leviticus 22:17-33.

⁴ Leviticus 23:1-44.

from the unclean (Leviticus 11), and to observe the appointed times of the Lord (Leviticus 23), note that these instructions will be followed by the Zadokites in the era of the future Temple that Ezekiel speaks about:

“Moreover, they shall teach My people *the difference* between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My Sabbaths” (Ezekiel 44:23-24).

So as you ponder our Torah portion this week, comparing and contrasting it with the description of Ezekiel’s future Temple, where do you find yourself as a Messianic Believer today? Certainly with the revelation God has unleashed forth from Moses and the Prophets, and coupling it in particular with the good news of Messiah Yeshua and His atoning sacrifice, you might want to ask yourself a few questions.

Who are the Zadokites going to be? Could they be the sons of righteousness (since the name Zadok derives from *tzaddiq*, צַדִּיק) who are righteous because of their faith in the Messiah of Israel? Is there a connection between the faiths that made Abraham righteous (Genesis 15:6), and the righteousness that Habakkuk speaks about (Habakkuk 2:4)—the same faith you have in the Messiah Yeshua? Could you be like a son of Zadok in the Messiah Yeshua?

If you are a Zadokite or a “son of righteousness,” because of your faith in the Messiah Yeshua, are you fulfilling your role as one who teaches others about the difference between the holy and the profane? Are you helping others to discern the difference between the clean and the unclean? Are you knowledgeable about the ordinances of God, and able and willing to not only be an example, but are you letting yourself serve as a testimony to those who oppose the instructions of the Most High? Are you helping others in their celebration of the appointed times, and helping to sanctify the Sabbaths of the Lord?

Years ago I read a book by C.R. Oliver entitled, *Sons of Zadok*. While the author was not embracing a Messianic perspective in his walk, he did communicate the need for Believers to minister unto the Lord. I believe that as we study and read what Moses’ instructions were for the Ancient Israelites, Ezekiel’s prophecies about the future Temple, and Yeshua’s teachings in the Gospels—born again Believers have not only the opportunity and responsibility to lead and direct others in the ways of the Holy One, but the privilege.

I encourage you to review these words from our Lord Yeshua Himself. Perhaps you might pick up the reality that He is admonishing His followers to be righteous sons and daughters of God, active in their responsibility to teach others by making disciples:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father

who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3-19).

Loyalty to the King of Kings is far beyond Zadok’s loyalty to David and Solomon. Being a Zadokite is a great honor, **but being a redeemed child of the Most High is even greater!**

What convicted me the most as I was reviewing the above quotations from Yeshua’s Sermon on the Mount, was how Messiah followers are to be blessed and satisfied by hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). A question kept reverberating in my heart all week, asking me simply this: *Do I hunger and thirst for righteousness?*

Am I starved for righteousness? Am I dying of thirst to maintain holiness? As I thought about these physical conditions that often bring discomfort, I wondered about the uneasiness of observing unrighteousness. In this wicked and perverse generation, with the morals of our society being dismantled right before our eyes, I wondered how many of my fellow Believers are seeking righteousness with a hunger and thirst. This is a righteousness that translates into a zeal, which just might qualify them to be Zadokites—or at least people like them—in the Millennial Kingdom.

While our righteousness comes by faith in the atoning work of the Messiah, we also know that according to James the Just, faith without works is dead (James 2). If your personal hungering and thirsting for righteousness is not evidencing itself in disciplines that lead to further sanctification, you just might want to ask yourself if you are satisfied with your walk with the Messiah. Are you walking in the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Are you bearing fruit for His Kingdom? If not, you have a choice to make and improvements to implement.

The choice to seek righteousness is up to us, and only we can make those moment by moment decisions. The blessings and satisfaction of righteousness we receive, evidence themselves in obedience to the Holy One and His ways. May we not be found wanting!