

Ezekiel 45-46
Psalm 20
Hebrews 12

“Worship and Justice”

April 10, 2011

What do worship and justice have to do with each other?
In the modern world you might assume “not much”!

Which suggests that we may be perilously close to the attitude of Israel before the Exile.

Many in Israel appear to have thought that if they would only worship correctly,
then everything would be okay.
So long as we offer the correct sacrifices, then God will forgive us for whatever else we do.

Do you see where that leads?
We can live however we want during the week,
but as long as we worship correctly, God will forgive us!

This attitude is described more fully in Amos 8:4-6 –
*Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end,
saying, When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain?
And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale,
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great
and deal deceitfully with false balances,
that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals
and sell the chaff of the wheat?*

God has a few choice words to say in response to this attitude in Amos 5:21-24

*"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.
Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

What is the relationship between worship and justice?
If there is no justice, God does not receive our worship!
If our assemblies are not characterized by righteousness – in all our relationships,
then they are despicable in the sight of God.

We've been talking in Sunday school about poverty being expressed in our relationships.
Righteousness is a legal term that refers to the right ordering of those relationships.
Righteousness is expressed in the structures of a society.
We have very little control over the structures of the United States –
or even of South Bend.
We have more control (though less than we think) over the structures of our church –
or of our homes.

Righteousness does not mean that everyone has the same amount of stuff.
Righteousness means that the society is properly ordered.

This is what Ezekiel is dealing with in chapters 45-46.

I'm not going to cover every verse here, because it would get rather repetitive,
but Ezekiel is concerned to see that what happened in Amos's day
never happens again.

This is part of what we saw last time when we looked at the radioactive holiness of the temple –
and the concern to keep clear separation between the holy and the common –
between the clean and the unclean.

Last week we looked at the priests and levites

and their role in preserving the holiness of the temple.

This week we look at the role of the prince in maintaining justice in Israel.

Israel's princes had led the way in idolatry and iniquity.

Now Israel's prince must lead in preserving right worship and justice.

We sing of this in Psalm 20,

which is really a song to the prince!

When we sing "The LORD in *Your Distress Attend*" –

the *you* is the prince – the Davidic king.

We are praying that God would send help from his sanctuary to support his anointed king

in the king's ministry of ruling and defending us –

in other words, in the king's ministry of establishing justice and righteousness among us.

Or, to say it another way, we are seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

We are praying that God would do as he has promised,

so that every knee would bow and every tongue confess

that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Sing Psalm 20

Read Hebrews 12

Introduction: the Division of the Inheritance (45:1-8)

Chapters 47-48 will give more detail for the division of the inheritance,

but chapter 45 introduces the subject with a focus on the temple,

because the temple is the center of Israel's inheritance.

Everything else revolves around the temple.

At the end of chapter 44 we heard that the priests do not share in the inheritance of Israel,

because the LORD himself is their inheritance.

Because of this, in chapter 45 we hear that the priests may build their houses

on the property reserved for Yahweh.

¹"When you allot the land as an inheritance, you shall set apart for the LORD a portion of the land as a holy district, 25,000 cubits long and 20,000 cubits broad. It shall be holy throughout its whole extent. ² Of this a square plot of 500 by 500 cubits shall be for the sanctuary, with fifty cubits for an open space around it. ³ And from this measured district you shall measure off a section 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 broad, in which shall be the sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. ⁴ It shall be the holy portion of the land. It shall be for the priests, who minister in the sanctuary and approach the LORD to minister to him, and it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary. ⁵ Another section, 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits broad, shall be for the Levites who minister at the temple, as their possession for cities to live in.

The holy district surrounds the temple.

Assuming the same cubit used earlier,

the holy district is 8 miles long and 6 ½ miles wide.

This 50 square mile area would be dotted with priestly and levitical cities.

In the law of Moses, the levitical cities were spread throughout Israel.

In the law of Ezekiel, the levitical cities are clustered together around the temple.

The temple must be thoroughly protected from anything that could profane it!

⁶"Alongside the portion set apart as the holy district you shall assign for the property of the city an area 5,000 cubits broad and 25,000 cubits long. It shall belong to the whole house of Israel.

In verse 6 we hear about another strip of land that is for "the property of the city" where ordinary Israelites may live.

So the Levites live alongside one side of the holy district,

and the "city" (still unnamed) lies alongside the other side of the holy district.

Incidentally, did you notice the size of this holy city?

25,000 cubits by 25,000 cubits?

Once again – a square.

Once again – a multiple of 25!

If you want to get a sense for the size of this holy city, it is 8 miles square,

it would be as if you drew a line along Cleveland Road west to the Bypass,

then south to Kern Road,

then down Kern Road to 331 –

and then north up Main St Mishawaka to Cleveland.

In the distribution of the land in Joshua's day

the land was divided in a realistic manner –

with each tribe receiving land with fairly natural boundaries.

In Ezekiel's distribution of the land

everything is set up in neat strips that totally ignore natural boundaries.

Rivers, mountains, seas – these are irrelevant.

It is an artificial division of the land
oriented around the temple.

⁷ *"And to the prince shall belong the land on both sides of the holy district and the property of the city, alongside the holy district and the property of the city, on the west and on the east, corresponding in length to one of the tribal portions, and extending from the western to the eastern boundary⁸ of the land. It is to be his property in Israel. And my princes shall no more oppress my people, but they shall let the house of Israel have the land according to their tribes.*

If you go from the holy city west to the Mediterranean or east to the Dead Sea,
all that land belongs to the prince.

Last time, we saw how the prince had a special place in the outer court of the temple.

He alone could eat in the vestibule of the east gate.

Here again, we see the importance of the prince.

His land is closest to the holy place.

But at the same time the prince is excluded from the holy place.

We will come back to the prince's inheritance at the conclusion in chapter 46!

But in between these two references to the inheritance
there are three declarations: "Thus says the Lord GOD."

I would suggest that each times God says "thus says the Lord GOD"
there is a coherent claim in each passage.

And together these claims demand that *justice* be expressed in our worship.

1. Justice in the Economics of Worship (45:9-17)

⁹*"Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and righteousness. Cease your evictions of my people, declares the Lord GOD.*

At face value, this sounds like a purely economic point.

But we've just been talking about how the division of the land relates to worship –
and verses 9-17 quickly move from the economic back to the liturgical.

You cannot have "right worship" unless you have "just economics."

You may not use violence and oppression against others.

The princes – the leaders of God's people – must execute justice and righteousness,
and must cease their evictions of God's people.

In the promised land, each family had its own inheritance.

The most famous "eviction" in the Bible is when Ahab and Jezebel
evicted Naboth from his vineyard by murdering him and seizing his land!

How would you apply this?

Today, we don't have exactly the same inheritance laws,
but consider the following parallel from present-day Atlanta:

A PCA pastor of an urban church plant decided that he should live around his parishioners,
so he bought a vacant lot downtown and built a house there.

Nobody had built a house in that neighborhood for 50 years –
so his decision attracted a lot of attention!

Within a few weeks of moving in, he noticed that other people were starting to do the same.
He had started a trend – and within months his property value started to go up.
A few months later, a widow from his congregation came to his door:
her rent had gone up and she had been evicted because she couldn't pay!

The pastor quickly realized that his decision to move here was (in part)
responsible for her eviction.

“As my was accumulating, [her] poverty was deepening.”

That didn't make his decision wrong –
after all, the neighborhood had been a wreck before!
But he recognized that justice required him
to use his influence for the good of his poor parishioners.
They organized a housing program (like Habitat for Humanity)
that would enable poor people to become homeowners.

<http://byfaithonline.com/page/in-the-world/gentrification-with-justice>

In the modern world, you can enrich yourself at the expense of others without trying!
The impersonal way in which modern markets work require that we pay careful attention
to how our economic dealings affect others.

Verses 10-12 speak of this:

¹⁰ "You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath. ¹¹The ephah and the bath shall be of the same measure, the bath containing one tenth of a homer, and the ephah one tenth of a homer; the homer shall be the standard measure. ¹² The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels plus twenty-five shekels plus fifteen shekels shall be your mina.

In the ancient world, dishonest merchants would have one set of weights for buying,
and another for selling.

When buying, their “pound” would weigh 16 ounces.

When selling, their “pound” would weigh 15 ounces.

And so with every transaction, they would gain an extra ounce!

Ezekiel declares that justice demands integrity of weights and measures.

In the modern world that includes integrity in billing

(it is a *sin* to withhold payment beyond the due date,
in order that you might make a little extra interest!
After all, that money does not belong to you.
It is theft – it is exactly the same as unjust weights and measures.)

And this sort of justice and integrity must be exercised in worship as well!

Verses 13-17 speak of how to apply the justice of weights and measures to the feasts of Israel:

¹³ *"This is the offering that you shall make: one sixth of an ephah from each homer of wheat, and one sixth of an ephah from each homer of barley,* ¹⁴ *and as the fixed portion of oil, measured in baths, one tenth of a bath from each cor (the cor, like the homer, contains ten baths).* ¹⁵ *And one sheep from every flock of two hundred, from the watering places of Israel for grain offering, burnt offering, and peace offerings, to make atonement for them, declares the Lord GOD.* ¹⁶ *All the people of the land shall be obliged to give this offering to the prince in Israel.* ¹⁷ *It shall be the prince's duty to furnish the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the new moons, and the Sabbaths, all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall provide the sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement on behalf of the house of Israel.*

The implication should be clear:

don't skimp in your religious obligations either!

Note that these offerings go beyond the tithes and firstfruits that would have been due.

A faithful Israelite had many economic obligations –
not just 10%.

The point of the whole economic system of the OT
was to show that *everything* that we have comes from God
and therefore should be used in his service.

But look more closely at verses 13-17:

Moses had required the sacrifices for the feasts to be brought by the heads of the tribes.

Now it is the prince who brings them.

The people of the land are to bring sheep, wheat, barley, and oil to the prince
“to make atonement for them”.

These are essentially “taxes” – religious taxes paid to the prince for religious purposes
(on average about 1%).

And the prince is then to bring burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings
“at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel”
in order to “make atonement on behalf of the house of Israel.”

In Moses' day Israel was represented by the leaders of all the tribes,
the people of Israel are now represented by one man – the prince.

The book of Samuel teaches us that Israel's tribes had failed,

they had rejected God as king over them,
and so God rejected Israel as his firstborn son,
and called the king to succeed where Israel had failed.

Of course, we know that Jesus is that king!

2. Justice in the Prince's Offerings for the Feasts of the LORD (45:18-25)

Verses 18-25 then speak of the particulars of the sacrifices.

¹⁸Thus says the Lord GOD: In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a bull from the herd without blemish, and purify the sanctuary. ¹⁹The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the temple, the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and the posts of the gate of the inner court. ²⁰You shall do the same on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned through error or ignorance; so you shall make atonement for the temple.

This is still fundamentally about issues of justice.

The prince's offerings are about establishing righteousness in Israel.
Given the fact that there will be sins – error and ignorance –
the prince is responsible for maintaining public righteousness.

When there has been sin – either individual or corporate –
the priest shall cleanse the sanctuary with blood.

Verse 18 speaks of a “New Year’s Day” ritual,
which appears to shift Moses’ Day of Atonement (which had been in the 7th month)
to the first month in Ezekiel’s calendar.

This appears to be a clear statement that the Mosaic Day of Atonement has failed.
The sacrificial system of Moses has fallen short.

And in the new temple, there must be a new law –
a new sacrificial system,
with a new Day of Atonement.

Of course, the problem with Ezekiel’s new law and new Day of Atonement
is that it still doesn’t deal once for all with sin.
It is still a cyclical pattern that will continue forever –

or, at least so long as righteousness depends on Israel’s obedience!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out that for the believer – the disciple:

“his doing of the law is in fact perfect....
Because between the disciples and the law stands one who has perfectly fulfilled it,
one with whom they live in communion.
They are faced not with a law which has never yet been fulfilled,

but with one whose demands have already been satisfied.
The righteousness it demands is already there,
the righteousness of Jesus which submits to the cross
because that is what the law demands.
This righteousness is therefore not a duty owed,
but a perfect and truly personal communion with God,
and Jesus not only possesses this righteousness,
but is himself the personal embodiment of it.
He is the righteousness of the disciples.” (Bonhoeffer, 113)

²¹ *"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall celebrate the Feast of the Passover, and for seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten. ²²On that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a young bull for a sin offering. ²³And on the seven days of the festival he shall provide as a burnt offering to the LORD seven young bulls and seven rams without blemish, on each of the seven days; and a male goat daily for a sin offering. ²⁴And he shall provide as a grain offering an ephah for each bull, an ephah for each ram, and a hin of oil to each ephah. ²⁵In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month and for the seven days of the feast, he shall make the same provision for sin offerings, burnt offerings, and grain offerings, and for the oil.*

Verses 21-25 then speak of the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles –
again emphasizing the importance of the prince as the one who provides the sacrifices
for all the people.

It is worth pointing out that Ezekiel’s Passover is considerably different from Moses’ Passover.
The biggest difference is that whereas for Moses, the focus of Passover is on the *lamb*,
for Ezekiel there *is no lamb* at Passover!

It is possible that Ezekiel is focusing only on what the *prince* should offer at Passover,
so he may leave out the fact that every family should bring a lamb.

This highlights the role of the prince as the one who leads Israel to do justice.

Jesus, of course, is our prince,
who “bears responsibility for the sanctification of the temple and the nation.”
(Block, 667)

And we are his people – who are sanctified through his offering.

3. The Gates, the Prince, and the People (46:1-15)

¹*"Thus says the Lord GOD: The gate of the inner court that faces east shall be shut on the six working days, but on the Sabbath day it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened. ²The prince shall enter by the vestibule of the gate from outside, and shall take his stand by the post of the gate. The priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate. Then he shall go out, but the gate shall not be shut until evening. ³The people of the land shall bow down at the entrance of that gate before the*

LORD on the Sabbaths and on the new moons. ⁴ The burnt offering that the prince offers to the LORD on the Sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish. ⁵ And the grain offering with the ram shall be an ephah, and the grain offering with the lambs shall be as much as he is able, together with a hin of oil to each ephah. ⁶ On the day of the new moon he shall offer a bull from the herd without blemish, and six lambs and a ram, which shall be without blemish. ⁷ As a grain offering he shall provide an ephah with the bull and an ephah with the ram, and with the lambs as much as he is able, together with a hin of oil to each ephah. ⁸ When the prince enters, he shall enter by the vestibule of the gate, and he shall go out by the same way.

46:1-8 then deal with the sacrifices and ritual for the Sabbath and the new moon – the only times when the east gate of the inner court would be open.

Moses had prescribed the offerings for the Sabbath and the new moon.

Ezekiel changes the offerings – tripling the lambs of the Sabbath offerings, from two to six – (see Numbers 28)

and slightly diminishing the offerings for the new moon

from two bulls to one, and from seven lambs to six.

The net effect is to elevate the importance of the weekly Sabbath, with only a slight diminution of the monthly feast.

⁹ *"When the people of the land come before the LORD at the appointed feasts, he who enters by the north gate to worship shall go out by the south gate, and he who enters by the south gate shall go out by the north gate: no one shall return by way of the gate by which he entered, but each shall go out straight ahead. ¹⁰ When they enter, the prince shall enter with them, and when they go out, he shall go out.*

Verses 9-10 then speak of how the worshipers shall enter and leave the outer court.

No one is permitted to exit by the same gate he entered.

And the prince shall enter with the people and exit with the people – he has a special role – but he is still one with his brothers –

a point that Hebrews will emphasize regarding Jesus.

¹¹ *"At the feasts and the appointed festivals, the grain offering with a young bull shall be an ephah, and with a ram an ephah, and with the lambs as much as one is able to give, together with a hin of oil to an ephah. ¹² When the prince provides a freewill offering, either a burnt offering or peace offerings as a freewill offering to the LORD, the gate facing east shall be opened for him. And he shall offer his burnt offering or his peace offerings as he does on the Sabbath day. Then he shall go out, and after he has gone out the gate shall be shut.*

¹³ *"You shall provide a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to the LORD daily; morning by morning you shall provide it. ¹⁴ And you shall provide a grain offering with it morning by morning, one sixth of an ephah, and one third of a hin of oil to moisten the flour, as a grain offering to the LORD. This is a perpetual statute. ¹⁵ Thus the lamb and the meal offering and the oil shall be provided, morning by morning, for a regular burnt offering.*

Verses 13-14 then provide for the daily offerings in the temple.
Moses had required both a morning and an evening sacrifice.
Ezekiel requires only a morning sacrifice,
perhaps prefiguring the vision of John in Revelation
where in the heavenly city there is no night.

Conclusion: The Prince and the Inheritance of Israel (46:16-18)

¹⁶"Thus says the Lord GOD: If the prince makes a gift to any of his sons as his inheritance, it shall belong to his sons. It is their property by inheritance. ¹⁷But if he makes a gift out of his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his to the year of liberty. Then it shall revert to the prince; surely it is his inheritance—it shall belong to his sons. ¹⁸The prince shall not take any of the inheritance of the people, thrusting them out of their property. He shall give his sons their inheritance out of his own property, so that none of my people shall be scattered from his property."

In verses 16-18 we return to the theme where we started –
the division of the inheritance of Israel.
The royal lands – the lands of the prince –
may not be alienated.
As the prince may not disinherit the peoples of Israel,
so also he may not disinherit his own heirs!

In the year of liberty – the Year of Jubilee –
the land would revert to its original owner.

We saw last time that the priests had no inheritance except the LORD's own offerings.
Now we see that the prince may not accumulate land for himself –
and may not alienate his own land to reward his followers.

How should we think about this?
We buy and sell property all the time!
God never divided the state of Indiana and gave it as an inheritance to his people!

But trying to make direct applications from Ezekiel to us bypasses Ezekiel's point!
Ezekiel's point is that "The land is the LORD's and he divides it.
For the prince to intrude on the divinely sanctioned division [of the land]
by amassing great quantities of land for himself
is as impermissible as intruding on the central presence of God
in the inner sanctuary or offering improper sacrifices to God." (Duguid,
520)

If you try to find the place and time where Ezekiel's vision was fulfilled,
you will look in vain!
Ezekiel's temple was never built.
Ezekiel's legislation was never put into practice!

But that was never the point of Ezekiel's vision!

Ezekiel is not predicting something that *will be*,
he is describing something that in a very real sense *already was*.

Ezekiel vision describes a world in which space and time are reordered under the rule of God.
The whole land is reordered around the temple.
Weeks and months and years are reordered around the feasts.

Ezekiel sees a vision of the heavenly temple –
a new order that has already begun (by faith)
but is not yet visibly realized (by sight).

But when you live by faith – believing the reality of that heavenly vision –
it gives you strength to implement that heavenly vision.

The righteousness of the heavenly kingdom is to be exemplified (even in this age)
by those who live by faith –
even in our decisions regarding property.

Think about how Jesus applies this principle of worship and justice:
if you have brought your gift to the altar,
and you remember that your brother has something against you –
leave your gift at the altar, and go, be reconciled with your brother.
(Matthew 5:23)