

Ezekiel 44:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before.

Analysis

Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before. This regulation restricts priestly marriage to maintain ritual purity and symbolic holiness. The Hebrew almanah (אֲלָמָנָה, "widow") and gerushah (גֶּרֶשָׁה, "divorced woman") were generally forbidden, with one exception: **a widow that had a priest before** (almanah asher tihyeh almanah mik-kohen)—a priest's widow could remarry within the priesthood.

The requirement for **maidens of the seed of the house of Israel** (betulot miz-zera beit Yisrael) emphasizes both virginity and covenant lineage. This parallels the High Priest's restriction to marry only a virgin (Leviticus 21:13-14), though Ezekiel's millennial temple applies this to all priests. The rationale is both practical (avoiding complicated inheritance disputes) and symbolic—priests represent God's holiness and the covenant community's exclusive relationship to Yahweh, pictured in marriage to a virgin bride.

This foreshadows Christ and His church: **Christ the High Priest presents His bride "as a chaste virgin" without spot or blemish** (2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:27). The church's purity comes not from inherent virtue but from Christ's cleansing—positional holiness imputed through faith. The exception for priests' widows illustrates redemptive grace: those once joined to holiness may be restored to sacred service.

Historical Context

This appears in Ezekiel 40-48, the prophet's vision of a restored temple and reconstituted worship (circa 573 BC during Babylonian exile). While some provisions match Levitical law, others present stricter requirements—suggesting either idealized standards for millennial worship or heightened holiness expectations for restoration.

Under Mosaic law, ordinary priests could marry widows, though not divorced women or prostitutes (Leviticus 21:7). Only the High Priest was restricted to virgins (Leviticus 21:13-14). Ezekiel's vision elevates all priests to near-High Priestly standards, reflecting the holiness theme pervading chapters 40-48. The exiles needed to understand that return from Babylon required renewed commitment to covenant distinctiveness—no compromise with pagan practices, including marriage customs.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the church as Christ's bride reflect the purity and exclusive devotion pictured in priestly marriage regulations?
2. What does the exception for priests' widows teach about God's redemptive grace toward those with complicated pasts who seek to serve Him?

