

Ezekiel
Week 21
The Temple Vision
Chapters 40-42

As with the opening vision of Ezekiel (1:1–2), the present one opens with a double date formula: “In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city—on that very day the hand of the Lord was upon me and he took me there” (40:1). Whereas the opening vision of the heavenly King on his throne had been dated from the exile of the earthly king, Jehoiachin, this vision of the heavenly city is dated from the destruction of the earthly city, Jerusalem.

Fourteen years have passed since that momentous, earth-shattering event, twenty-five since the beginning of the Exile. In these dates, especially the fact that the vision took place on the tenth of the first month, a reference to the Jubilee year is generally seen. On the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, every fiftieth year, the trumpets were to be blown announcing a specially holy year, a year of proclaiming liberty throughout the land (Lev. 25:8–13). All land bought and sold in the intervening period was to be returned to its original owners, so that those who had lost their land and been reduced to slave status might return to their ancestral heritage (25:13).

It is not too hard to see what correlation might be drawn by the exiles between their present landless, enslaved state and the predicament of many in former times who lived in between Jubilees. The tenth day of the first month of the twenty-fifth year of exile, as the halfway point to the next Jubilee, was a natural time of looking forward to the release that the Lord had announced in Ezekiel 34–37.

There on the mountaintop Ezekiel is met by an angelic figure, who will be his tour guide around the temple. This is not his first visionary guided tour of a temple; in chapter 8 he received a similar tour of the defiled Jerusalem temple and all its abominations, conducted by a similar figure. That vision culminated in the departure of “the glory of the Lord” from the temple (10:18), just as the vision in chapters 40–42 culminates in the return of that glory to the new temple (43:1–5). The focus of the temple vision, then, is the reversal of the divine abandonment of God’s people that had culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is highly significant that the first thing the prophet sees on his tour is a wall surrounding the whole temple area (40:5). Walls have as their purpose regulating and defining space; they are there to mark territory as “inside” or “outside” and to regulate access to the “inside” space.¹

¹ Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (p. 472). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

The east gate was the gate through which Yahweh's glory would make its entry (Ezek 43:1–5). God's glory had left the temple through the same gate (10:19). Since temples tended to be oriented toward the east, this would be the most important gate.²

The measurements and features of the gates of the inner court were identical with those of the gates of the outer courtyard in vv. 5–16 in every detail but one. Each gate leading to the inner courtyard had eight steps instead of seven (vv. 31, 34, 37). The use of the number eight was considered in rabbinic literature to have messianic overtones. The eight steps typologically pictured the Messiah as a means of access to the inner court and sanctuary, therefore the presence of Yahweh.

The only priests who could minister at the altar were the descendants of Zadok, a priest who remained loyal to David during the insurrection of Absalom (2 Sam 15:24–29), and whose descendants remained loyal to Yahweh through the course of Israel's growing idolatry (Ezek 44:15). Zadok also anointed Solomon as David's successor (1 Kgs 1:32–35) and refused to join Abiathar in support of Adonijah's vain attempt to supplant Solomon (1 Kgs 1:5–26). Solomon appointed as high priest Zadok, a descendant of Aaron through Eleazar, instead of Abiathar, a descendant through Ithamar (1 Sam 2:31–33; 1 Kgs 2:26–27, 35; 1 Chr 6:3–8; 24:3). The reward for faithfulness to David continued to Zadok's descendants, who also remained faithful during the exile. Some have suggested that Zadok was a Jebusite priest of Yahweh in Jerusalem when David conquered the city. But the designation "Levites" in v. 46 rules out this possibility. Presentation of the Zadokite priesthood because of its loyalty to David anticipates the New Testament concept of the priesthood of believers who are to be loyal to the new David, the Messiah, and his kingdom (see 1 Pet 2:9–10).³

Both ideas of holiness and sacrifice are present in the summary statement of 40:47. (1) The inner courtyard is a perfect square, a hundred cubits in each direction, for the square is the shape of the holy. (2) At its geometric center is the altar (C), the only piece of furniture noted in the courtyard, which is the place of sacrifice.⁴

Carved on the walls of the outer and inner chambers of the sanctuary were cherubim and palm trees. These cherubim were like the ones the prophet had seen in his visions in 1:5–25 and 10:9–17. Cherubim appear several places in Scripture and are always guardians of the holiness of God. They were there specifically to remind the priests not to enter the holy of holies. Cherubim appeared in the garden of Eden to protect the presence of God and prevent any person from approaching him after human sin entered the world (Gen 3:22–24). Cherubim were placed on the veil of the tabernacle to guard the presence of God in the holy of holies (Exod 26:31). Inside the holy of holies two cherubim sat atop the ark of the covenant, again as guardians of the presence of God (Exod 25:18–22.)

² Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament*](#) (electronic ed., Eze 40:6). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Cooper, L. E. (1994). [*Ezekiel*](#) (Vol. 17, p. 364). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁴ Duguid, I. M. (1999). [*Ezekiel*](#) (p. 475). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

The meaning of the palm tree and its use in the sanctuary is associated with the covenant of peace expressed in 34:25 and 37:26. Elsewhere in Scripture the palm tree symbolized righteousness (Ps 92:12) and longevity (vv. 18–20). Cherubim and palm trees were also featured in the Solomonic temple (see 1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35–36).

One cannot but be impressed by the detail and careful plan that unfolded in Ezekiel's description of the temple. He was shown by his angel-guide the future temple that would exceed all former temples in size and beauty. He saw a temple that had perfect symmetry and was symbolic of the holiness of God. The graduated levels and divisions that led to the holy of holies provided a line of demarcation and separation between the common and the holy (42:20). This was a temple that was clearly designed for worship and sacrifice to Yahweh, who had promised to restore his people Israel to their land.⁵

Conclusion

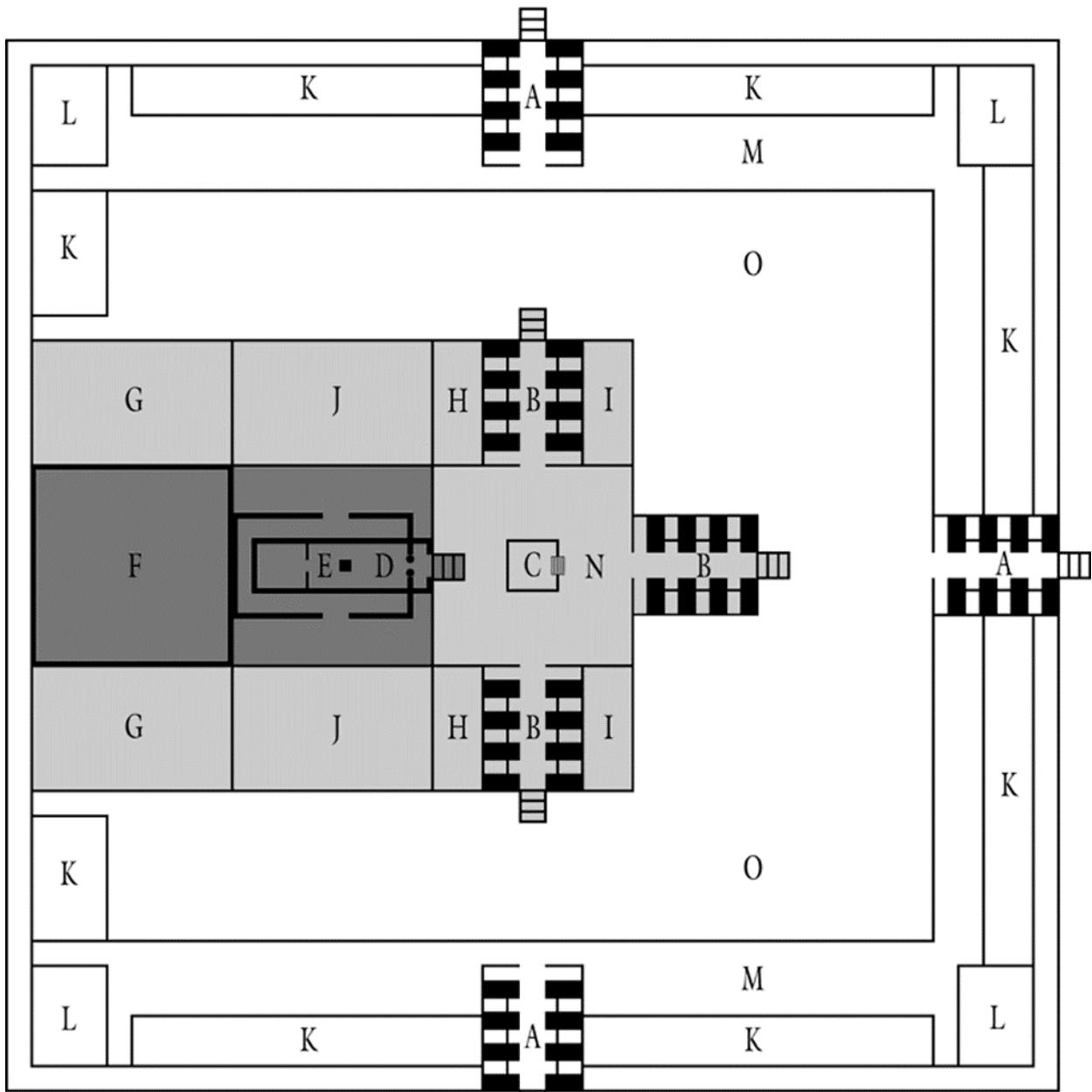
Like the account of Genesis 1–11, this cosmogony revolves around the idea of separation and order, but this is significantly a new Eden without a fall. This is a paradise with walls, to prevent new humankind from being driven from the presence of God (as in Gen. 3), or from driving God from their midst (as in Ezek. 8–11). Though the form may be unfamiliar to us, it is neither the nostalgic musings of a frustrated priest nor the precise notations of an inspired architect. It is a literary piece describing, in symbols drawn from temple categories, the brave new world of the future as a challenge and encouragement to God's people in Ezekiel's day and for us in the present (43:10–12).

These similarities and differences find striking focus in the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21, the final, eschatological "world" of biblical revelation. That this visionary "Holy City" is modeled on the temple of Ezekiel 40–48 is indisputable: John is carried away to a great and high mountain to see this city (Rev. 21:10), and he too is accompanied by an angel with a measuring rod (21:15). The city is square, with a great high wall around it and prominent gates, while a river of life flows from its center (22:1). All of these features come directly from Ezekiel 40–48. Yet the differences from Ezekiel's vision are equally striking. The city of Revelation has no temple (21:22), there are twelve gates around the perimeter (not three, as in Ezekiel's temple), and they stand perpetually wide open to the nations (21:12).

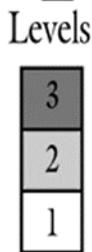
Thus, Ezekiel's temple points forward clearly and unequivocally to the salvation that God accomplished in Christ. Ezekiel's vision is not a heavenly construction plan that we are to establish on earth as part of a program of building the kingdom. Rather, the prophet saw something that already exists in heavenly form as a depiction of the kingdom that God himself is constantly engaged in building⁶

⁵ Cooper, L. E. (1994). [Ezekiel](#) (Vol. 17, p. 372). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (p. 483). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.



- A. Outer gates (40:15-16, 20-27)
- B. Inner gates (40:28-37)
- C. Altar of Burnt Offering (43:13-17)
- D. Temple (40:48-41:11, 15-26)
- E. Inner Altar (41:22)
- F. "Building" (41:12-14)
- G. Priestly buffer zone (42:1-14)
- H. Priestly rooms (40:44-46)



- I. Rooms for preparing offerings (40:38)
- J. Outer rooms (41:9b-10)
- K. Worshiper's rooms (40:17)
- L. Kitchens (46:19-24)
- M. Pavement (40:18)
- N. Inner Court (40:44)
- O. Outer court (40:17-19)

Figure 1. The Plan of Ezekiel's Temple