

# THE GATES OF THE EZEKIELIAN TEMPLE

by

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(Under the Direction of David S. Williams)

## ABSTRACT

This study will investigate the meaning and purpose of the six gates in the Ezekielian temple as they are described in the last chapters of the book of Ezekiel. It is my contention that these gates find their meaning in the notion of holy space and their purpose in the correction of worship. The first chapter will introduce the situation that led to the Babylonian exile and the scholarship on the temple vision. The second chapter will explain the notions of holiness and holy space as they are described in the Hebrew Bible. The third chapter will reveal the concentric zoning of the Ezekielian temple. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters will detail the six gates of the temple complex, their architecture, purpose and meaning.

**INDEX WORDS:** Ezekiel, Architecture, Temple, Temple Vision, Blueprint, Gates, Holiness, Holiness Spectrum, Holy Space, Exile, Hebrew Bible, Old Testament

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## DEDICATION

To my family, friends and mentors.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American School or Oriental Research</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BHTh</i>	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>BZAW</i>	Beihfte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>HAT</i>	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBLMS</i>	Journal of Biblical Literature – Monograph Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament – Supplement Series
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Outdestamentsische Studien</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature – Dissertation Series
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature – Seminar Papers</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	Vetus Testamentus – Supplement Series
<i>WBC</i>	World Biblical Commentary
<i>WO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orient</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel 40-48 reports that, in the twenty-fifth year of the Babylonian exile, the prophet Ezekiel was transported by God to the land of Israel and taken to tour a perfect temple. This thesis will analyze one of the architectural features of the visionary temple: the six gates which allow a progressive and privileged proximity to Yahweh. These gates, described in precise details in the vision of the prophet, guard holy space and symbolically answer the main question of the community Ezekiel is addressing: When will we go back home?

#### **Historical Background**

Prior to the exile, the last years of the kingdom of Judah were marked by a succession of shifts of allegiance to the two super-powers of the Ancient Near East, the kingdoms of Babylon and Egypt. Assyria had been conquered by the Chaldeans who had established the great Babylonian dynasty and started their expansion, while the kingdom of Judah was still bound to Egypt by a suzerainty treaty. In 605 B.C.E. the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the city of Carchemish and the same year Jehoiakim, king of Judah, switched allegiance and bound himself and his kingdom to the Babylonian overlord Nebuchadnezzar.

In 601 Nebuchadnezzar directly attacked Egypt and was defeated. The buffer states, to which Judah belonged, were now facing the dilemma of having to choose between Egypt and Babylon the future overlord with which they should side. Under the influence of Egypt, Jehoiakim withheld the payment of tributes to Babylon. In retaliation, Nebuchadnezzar launched

his armies against Judah in 598 B.C.E. and captured Jerusalem in 597. Jehoiachin, the son and successor of Jehoiakim, was taken in exile along with his family and a sizeable portion of the elite to which Ezekiel belonged.<sup>1</sup> The puppet king Zedekiah was put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, and he renewed the vassal oath to Babylon.

In 593, under the instigation of Egypt, Zedekiah and a number of Babylonian vassal states met in Jerusalem to plan a revolt against their overlord. Due tribute to Nebuchadnezzar was once again withheld, and in 588 the Babylonian king laid siege to the Judean capital. The city and the temple were eventually ravaged and burnt to the ground and a second wave of deportation toward Babylon was initiated. With the destruction of Jerusalem, the state of Judah ceased to exist as an independent political state and became a province of the Babylonian empire. The crisis was both religious and political: the institutions and framework of Judah had ceased to exist, and the survival of the community came to be focused on the exiled population to which the prophet Ezekiel belonged and preached.

### **The Situation in Exile**

The exact number of Judeans deported to Babylon is uncertain, but the group was large enough to keep a Jewish identity during the exile. Little is known about the condition of the exile. The Judeans seem to have enjoyed a reasonable amount of freedom, a relative prosperity and the right to be organized in semi-autonomous communities. There also seems to have been, as illustrated by the letter of Jeremiah to the exiles, means of communication between the ruined

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<sup>1</sup> The number of initial deportees varies in the Bible. 2 Kings 24:14 lists 10,000 deportees, yet 2 Kings 24:16 lists 7,000 warriors and 1000 artisans and Jeremiah 52:28 numbers 3023 deportees. It is not known if any of these numbers include only men or also women and children.

kingdom of Judah and the community in Babylon.<sup>2</sup> The exiles were not prisoners but “represented a compulsory transplanted subject population who were able to move about freely in their daily life, but were presumably compelled to render compulsory labor service.”<sup>3</sup>

Even if the conditions of life were bearable, the defeat, uprooting and deportation to Babylon must have left a psychological mark upon the members of the community. Back in Judah they had been the elite, with an important role in the political and religious life of the country, and they were suddenly deprived of both realms. The community had lost its independence, its land, its temple and its monarchy.<sup>4</sup>

The land belonged to Yahweh who had bestowed it as gift to Israel as an inheritance. This land was now in the hand of foreigners. The temple, the dwelling place of Yahweh, had been seen as a proof of Yahweh’s election; thus, its destruction called God in question: was Yahweh too weak to face the Babylonian deities? Had he rejected his own people? Yahweh had promised an eternal dynasty to king David; had he suddenly become unfaithful?

In short, the old symbol system and institutions could no longer function or provide solace. As R. Klein rightly asks, “what kind of future was possible for a people which traced its unique election to a God who had just lost a war to other deities? What kind of future was possible for a people who had so alienated their God that categorical rejection was his necessary response?”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a good description of the conditions of the exile see P. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968) 17-38.

<sup>3</sup> M. Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: A & C. Black, 1960) 296.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to the exile there were two pillars in Judah’s religious life, “there were the belief in a covenant between Yahweh and the house of David, and the special position of Jerusalem as Yahweh’s chosen dwelling-place.” R.E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) 109.

<sup>5</sup> R. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 5.

The future of the exiles as a people and as a religious community was, to say the least, discouraging. There was a definite need for mechanisms of survival within the community in order to maintain social cohesion and Jewish identity.

### **The Message of the Book of Ezekiel**

The Book of Ezekiel emerges from the background of the deportation and addresses it. It is a commentary on, and a rationalization of, the events of the exile. It attributes the abandonment by Yahweh and the succeeding events of destruction and deportation to a moral failure on the part of Judah. It addresses the guilt of the exiled community as well as its fundamental questions: Why did Yahweh allow such a catastrophe? How could this situation eventually be resolved?

Ezekiel's answer to the first question is that Yahweh left because of moral, social and political offenses (8-11). His answer to the second question is that Judah needs to turn away from its previous errors and abominations. The whole book leads to the Ezekielian solution, given in the shape of a riddle: the temple.

### **Authorship**

Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a virtual consensus on the authorship of the Book of Ezekiel, attributing it to the prophet Ezekiel in the age of the exile. In 1924, Gustav Hölscher attributed only a small part of the book to the actual prophet: the poetic oracles contained in 147 verses. Hölscher argued that the rest of the book was the work of a Zadokite editor writing long after the exile had come to an end.<sup>6</sup> This was the beginning of such a wide

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<sup>6</sup> G. Hölscher, *Hesekiel: Der Dichter und das Buch* BZAW 39 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1924).

array of divergences on the possible authorship of Ezekiel that McKeating comments “that almost the only thing about Ezekiel on which scholars did appear to be agreed was that the book did *not* ‘bear the stamp of a single mind.’”<sup>7</sup>

In 1950, the tide changed again. C.G. Howie, followed by G. Fohrer and K. Galling, re-established the traditional dating and authorship of the book as valid.<sup>8</sup> The problem of change in style and apparent expansions by a second hand was attributed to an “Ezekiel School” made up of disciples of the prophet striving to transmit his oracles.<sup>9</sup>

The position taken in this thesis follows that of Greenberg who adopted a “holistic” approach concentrating on the coherence that emerged out of the literary aspect of the text and the pattern of the material.<sup>10</sup> The core message of the book is a reflection on the situation of the exile and possible late additions have been included with regard and respect to this primary message.<sup>11</sup> I will use the name *Ezekiel* as that of the author/s or source of the book, keeping in mind that any addition to the Vorlage was presented as agreeing with the main polemics and themes of the primary source.

## **Chapter 40-48, the Nature of the Temple**

Chapters 40-48 which close the book of Ezekiel describe the vision of a perfect temple through which the prophet is led by a heavenly guide. Very precise details and measurements are

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<sup>7</sup>H. McKeating, *Ezekiel, Old Testament Guides* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 31-2. Also see pp. 30-61 for a very complete survey on the scholarship of Ezekiel.

<sup>8</sup> C.G. Howie, *The Date and Composition of Ezekiel*, JBLMS 4 (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1950) and G. Fohrer, and K. Galling, *Ezechiel*, HAT 13 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1955).

<sup>9</sup> See W. Zimmerli, “Deutero-Ezechiel?”, *ZAW* 84 (1972), 501-16 and Clements, “The Ezekiel Tradition: Prophecy in a Time of Crisis” in *Israel’s Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 128-133 who has proposed to associate this school with the editors of the Holiness Code.

<sup>10</sup> M. Greenberg, “The Design and Themes of Ezekiel’s Program of Restoration,” in *Interpretation of the Prophets* 38 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 186-87.

<sup>11</sup> P.M. Joyce points out that the book of Ezekiel “has proved notoriously resistant to any straightforward division into primary and secondary material,” since “secondary material (even where it can be identified) bears an unusually close ‘family resemblance’ to primary.” See “Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel,” in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, *OTS* 34 (1995) 115-28

given during this tour. These give such a realistic “feel” to the layout that it appears as an actual blueprint for the construction of a real temple. In the Ancient Near East, building a temple on a divine command imparted in dreams and visions was a widespread phenomenon. However, the typical building command followed a stereotyped formula, which is found incomplete in the text of Ezekiel.<sup>12</sup> The usual command for the building of a future temple started with a divine introduction or approval and included a list of the preparations of manpower and materials that would be necessary to build the temple.<sup>13</sup> Such a list is missing in Ezekiel since the temple is already built and there is no mention of human hands having to labor at it. As D. Block argues, “contrary to popular opinion, the description of the temple is not presented as a blueprint for some building to be constructed with human hands. Nowhere is anyone commanded to build it. The man with the measuring line takes Ezekiel on a tour of an existing structure already made.”<sup>14</sup>

The architecture described by the prophet is also problematic. No measurements of height are recorded, as if the blueprint was only meant to be a ground-plan. Width and depth measurements are artificially distorted to fit within a pattern related to the symbolic number twenty-five, even when this is done at the cost of architectural logic. If the blueprint is really a building plan, it is not a very practical one.

Because the temple is already built and the prophet is transported to what appears to be an unearthly realm, it could be argued that we are here dealing with an eschatological temple. Yet Block argues that “while many features of chs. 40-48 commend an eschatological interpretation, this view is weakened considerably by the absence of eschatological language.

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<sup>12</sup> For a complete description and analysis of this formula see V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Buildings in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*, JSOTSup 115 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 33-128.

<sup>13</sup> These are found in the account of the building of the tabernacle (Exod. 24:15-31:18), of Solomon’s temple (I Kgs, 5:15-9:25) and of the second temple in Ezra 1-6. Also see Ancient Near Eastern analogies in the Nabû-apla-iddina grant document in L.W. King *Babylonian Boundary Stone and Memorial-Tablets in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1912) XXXVI.

<sup>14</sup>D. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 505.



Expressions like ‘on that day,’ ‘in the latter days,’ and ‘after many years,’ common in the Gog oracles, are lacking entirely. ‘*ōlām*, ‘forever eternal,’ occurs three times, but in none of these does it carry a distinctly eschatological sense.”<sup>15</sup>

Since the vision of the Ezekielian temple bears resemblances to the description of the Solomonic temple, it has been argued that Ezekiel had the ruined temple in front of him as he was planning his blueprint. However, if the two temples do share similar elements, they also are different in many ways. As W. Zimmerli argues, the blueprint does not “afford straightforward recollection of the Solomonic temple burned to the ground by the Babylonians in 587. Caution in the use of Ezekiel’s temple vision for the reconstruction of the Solomonic temple, which North urges, is fully justified.”<sup>16</sup>

Currently, many scholars see the temple as a sociological blueprint, a riddle pointing to something beyond its mere architectural structure. As Block argues, “the issue for the prophet is not physical geography but spiritual realities. As in his earlier visions, historical events are described from a theological plane, and the interpreter’s focus must remain on the ideational value of that which is envisioned.”<sup>17</sup>

Zimmerli holds that a proclamation of salvation is encoded in the architectural plan and that “against the background of that earlier temple vision of chapter 8 what is revealed as new is a judgment on what has happened and a summons to turn their whole mind and all of their own resolve towards the new.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 504.

<sup>16</sup> W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 2:345.

<sup>17</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 505.

<sup>18</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:361.

J.Z. Smith sees chapters 40-48 as “an endeavor in mapping the social configuration of an ideal cultic place.”<sup>19</sup> The blueprint underlines a social map and social conflicts which Smith analyzes in terms of different hierarchies based on status and power.

For K.R. Stevenson the purpose of the blueprint is to create space and keep these spaces separated. Vertical measurements are not mentioned because they are not essential to delimit space. The issue at hand is not the architectural structure in itself, but the space it encloses. She describes Ezekiel 40-48 as “a system of territoriality which reflects this view of holiness and impurity, a system designed to prevent and purge the invasion into the holy.”<sup>20</sup> For Stevenson, the issues treated in the blueprint have both social and cosmic implications.

## **Thesis**

It is within this last stream of thought, that of the temple functioning as a riddle, that I will analyze the gates of the temple. I do believe that the temple is a symbol, organized around the notion of holy space and graded holiness. As Stevenson argues, the architecture delimits space. In turn, this space is of restricted access and is regulated by laws that are imposed by the architecture itself. Each imperative imposed by the architecture prevents the worshipers from committing an abomination. *It is my contention, therefore, that holy space and restricted access lead to a correct form of worship which had not been followed before the events of the exile.* Incorrect worship had caused the departure of Yahweh. Only when Israel turns back to a correct form of worship can Yahweh return. Likewise, in the vision, only when the temple has been described in all its details, with its unspoken regulations naturally imposed by the spatial organization of the structures, does the prophet describe the return of Yahweh.

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<sup>19</sup> J.Z. Smith, *To take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)48.

<sup>20</sup> K.R Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation: the Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40-48* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 43.

The gates are part of the temple complex and adhere to this symbolism. They delimit space and rectify wrongful worship of the laity as well as the abusive status of the prince and of the Levites.

In chapter two, I will introduce the notion of the holy as opposed to the profane, and show how the impure cannot come into contact with the holy without causing dramatic repercussions, such as for example, the events of the exile. I will describe the two ways that were used to protect holy space. One way was to regularly purge the sanctuary of impurities and the other was to keep impurities from reaching the sanctuary through a tight architecture or plan that prohibited the mixing of profane and holy and allowed for a certain secured amount of buffer zones between the two. The temple of Ezekiel is modeled around this type of device.

Chapter three will describe the blueprint of Ezekiel, starting with the land and ending with the Holy of Holies, the holiest place of the temple, the room where Yahweh dwells. I will show how the whole blueprint is organized around a pattern of concentric circles, each delimiting a holier place than the preceding one and therefore one of more restricted access. I will show how the measurements of the temple are not to be taken at face value since they are based on the symbolic pattern of the number twenty-five and how the lack of vertical measurements renders this blueprint totally unbuildable.

Chapter four will focus on the six gates which grant access to the outer and inner courts which are not a path of entry but, on the contrary, a device to keep people out. I will emphasize the architecture of these structures and show how the gates are fortresses, emulating military gates. Within this structures are a succession of buffer zones which, combined with a notion of elevation, hinder the progression to a holier space. I will show that within the outer north and

south gates is also encoded a form of crowd control that could have to do with a reform of sun-worship as it is described in Ezekiel 8-11.

Chapter five will analyze the east gates, which are the path of Yahweh's return. I will describe the diverse reasons that make the east gates so preeminent, including sun worship, the absence of a western gate and the emulation of Solomon's temple. I will describe the return of Yahweh and the subsequent closing of the east gates which symbolizes Yahweh's loyalty and might also be a correction of sun worship. I will show how the status and the form of worship of the prince are kept in check by the regulations of the east gates.

In chapter six, I will describe the north gate which is portrayed as a cultic room. I will present the possibility that the passage describing the north gate is a secondary addition by a priestly hand. This later author and Ezekiel shared a similar agenda but the priestly hand used a different symbolism in order to correct the main omission about the gates within the blueprint: their own lack of status on the holiness spectrum which will eventually lead to a clarification of the status of the Levites.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HOLINESS AND HOLY SPACE

In the Hebrew Bible, the notion of holiness and the identification of sacred space on the holiness spectrum are based upon separation. This motif of division runs throughout the Priestly Source. It starts in Genesis one, and the creation of the world by separation into different pairs of opposites, and is present in the blueprint of the tabernacle as well. The two realms that issue from this separation, the holy and the profane, define one another through the tension that exists between them.

In this chapter, I will define the notion of holiness and how it characterizes the holiness spectrum which is the lens through which the priestly school, of which Ezekiel is a member, conceptualizes the world in which the sanctuary is set as the holiest space. I will then discuss the issue of impurity and the possibility that holiness can be defiled through contagion, thereby resulting in dire historical consequences for the Judahites. This theology of pollution which is an inherent aspect of the notion of holiness in the Israelite world view is curtailed by different devices, such as rituals and physical boundaries.

#### **Holiness**

A clear definition of holiness is hard to come by. Holiness is usually defined as that which is opposed to the profane, which in turn is defined as that which is opposed to holiness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Otto gives a more concrete definition of the holy can be found in *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958). For Otto the five major aspects of the holy, include awfulness (*Tremendum*), inapproachability (*Majestas*), transcendence (*Energicum*), compelling (*Mysterium*) and vitality (*Fascinan*).

Philologically, the root *qđš* (used in *miqdāš*, *haqqōdeš* and *qōdeš haqqōdāšîm*, and usually translated as “to be holy; to sanctify”) expresses a notion of separation.<sup>2</sup> To be holy is to be separated from that which is not holy, to be set apart. Holiness is a preeminent characteristic of God. God himself is holy because he is apart. In his *Systematic Theology*, P. Tillich argues that divine holiness is the absolute transcendence of God in a metaphysical sense. God is separated, the other, the transcendent, distinct and separate from everything he has made.<sup>3</sup> God is not only the ideal manifestation of holiness but also the source of it. Holiness comes from God when he sets things apart, such as people (Israelites, priests, first born), places (Israel, temple), time (Sabbath), and thereby sanctifies them by establishing a special relationship with them.

Following this analysis the holy is by essence “the separated.” This separation signifies that a site or a person is taken from the profane realm, which is the natural realm of earthly things (holiness not being inherent in creation, but coming about through God’s actions) and elevated to a higher level, that of holier. The separation between the holy and the profane and the idea of tension between the two define each term.

### **The Holiness Spectrum and the Notion of Holy Space**

A society’s world view implies a stable set of categories through which experience is defined and understood by being assigned its proper place in the known order of things.<sup>4</sup> The separation between the sacred and the profane along the holiness spectrum is the most essential partition in the Israelite classificatory system. Loci, times, objects, and individuals all have their

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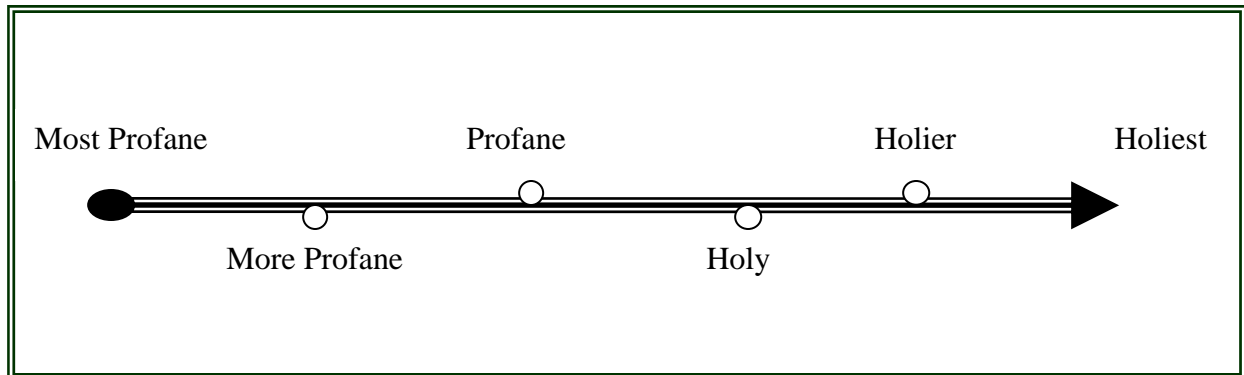
W. Eichrodt, in his *Theology of the Old Testament*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961) 1:271, has described it as “the awe inspiring majesty of the unapproachable king.”

<sup>2</sup> It is used either as a verb, a noun or an adjective over 850 times in the Hebrew Bible and 105 times in Ezekiel.

<sup>3</sup> P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 1:271-2.

<sup>4</sup> P.P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Concept of the World*, JSOTSup 106 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992)58.

fixed place in the holiness spectrum, some being profane, others holy according to God's choice. God imparts sanctification, by separating the holy from that which, by a lack of elevation to a higher status, will remain profane. Between the most profane and the holiest are a number of buffer zones. As shown in Figure 1, something or someone leaves the sphere of the profane when it is consecrated by being set apart.



**Figure 1: The Spectrum from Most Profane to Holiest**

In the case of individuals, the most profane are humans in general with, as buffer zones, Israelites, Levites, Priests, and High Priest to mediate with the holiest, God himself.<sup>5</sup> Because they have been separated and thereby given a privilege status by God, all consequent levels are holier than the preceding ones, which in turn are more profane than the subsequent one. The idea of separation is also what gives a specific locus its sanctity or lack thereof. For E.R. Leach, human reality consists of two realms, the physical human world and the metaphysical world. Sacred space is where these two worlds are brought into contact with one another through various rituals led by religious specialists who serve as intermediaries between the two worlds.<sup>6</sup>

In P, the tabernacle and the camp around it constitute a composition of distinct zones

<sup>5</sup> These consequent levels of graded holiness between the Israelite laity and God also prevent them from suffering from the potential lethality of a direct and unauthorized contact with Yahweh.

<sup>6</sup>E.R. Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

separated by boundaries. The terminology used for the different parts of the tabernacle also emphasizes this gradation: the Holy of Holies is called *qōdeš haqqōdāšim* (the most holy place) and the shrine itself is the *haqqōdeš* (the holy place). Within the layout of the Tabernacle, we have at least three spheres of graded sanctity, shown by strict lines of separation not only separating space but also restricting access to these different spheres. In the Hebrew Bible, the spatial dimension is associated to the personal dimension. The spatial restriction, which grants different degrees of access, emphasizes the distinction between people on the basis of sanctity. The taboo on access “is least strong when applied to the court and becomes progressively more powerful as one proceeds inside the tabernacle, until the area which is taboo even for priests themselves is reached.”<sup>7</sup> Aaron alone can enter the Holy of Holies, his sons the priests can enter the holy place, and the laity’s presence is restricted to the courtyard.<sup>8</sup> It is likely that the court contained areas of different degrees of holiness, since the area of the altar, where only the priests could officiate, seemed to be more holy than the rest of the court, which the laity could tread. Spatially also, the whole system is built on a notion of opposition between categories.<sup>9</sup>

## Impurities

What God has set apart and sanctified, however, can be defiled by impurities. The technical antonym of *qdš* is *hll* (profane, desecrate). This pair, holy/profane, is made up of exclusive and incompatible items, and “the presence or lack of dynamic quality distinguishes the

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<sup>7</sup>M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Services in Ancient Israel: an Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978)175.

<sup>8</sup> See Haran, *Temples and Temple-Services*, 184, who argues for two grades of holiness in the court, and J. Milgrom, “The Shared Custody of the Tabernacle and a Hittite Analogy” (*JAOS* 90, 1970) 207, who argues that it was the altar, as object which was holy and not the court itself.

<sup>9</sup>S.D. Kunin, *God’s Place in the World: Sacred Space and Sacred Place in Judaism* (London; New York: Cassel, 1998)17.



opposites from one another: profaneness is the lack of holiness and purity is the lack of impurity.”<sup>10</sup>

As shown in Figure 2, three types of combination, leading to three permitted, natural and relatively innocuous states, can result from the combination of the two pairs holy/profane and clean/unclean: holy and clean, profane and clean, profane and unclean.<sup>11</sup> The system thus described “is a relatively closed one... the vertical lines are oppositions, which are absolute and exclusive; the cross lines are compatibilities”<sup>12</sup>

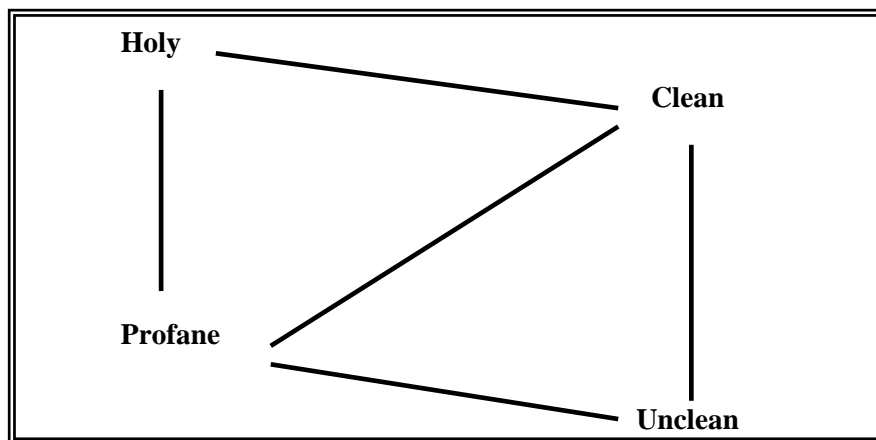


Figure 2: Compatibilities between the “Holy” and “Clean” Pairs.

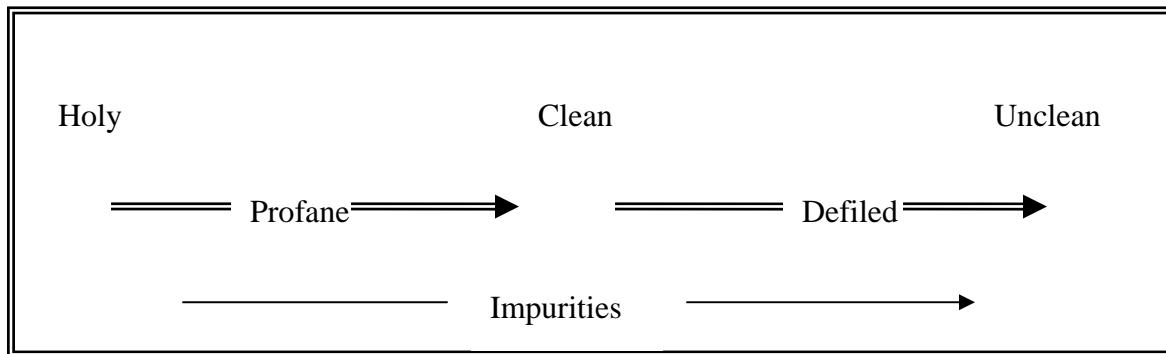
A fourth combination, that of holy and unclean, can also result from these two pairs. Impurity, or uncleanliness, is the state opposed to holiness and the one that can defile it because it is incompatible with it. Since purity, or cleanliness, is viewed as a counterpart and requirement of holiness, the state of holy and impure is obviously not desired and can be potentially dangerous.

<sup>10</sup> D.P. Wright, “Holiness” (*ABD* 3, 1992) 246.

<sup>11</sup> This diagram is adapted from J. Barr, “Semantic and Biblical Theology: a Contribution to the Discussion” in *VT* 23 (1972) 15.

<sup>12</sup> J. Barr, “Semantic and Biblical Theology” 16. See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), who assumes a slightly different interaction

For Israel, impurity was not an abstract notion. On the contrary, J. Milgrom argues that “impurity was a physical substance, an aerial miasma which possessed magnetic attraction from the realm of the sacred.”<sup>13</sup> Impurity, or pollution, could affect individuals, places and objects.



**Figure 3: Profanation by Impurities**

In the dynamic holiness spectrum illustrated in Figure 3, the holy and the unclean are at opposite poles and the clean serves as a buffer zone.<sup>14</sup> The spread of impurities can become very dangerous since it threatens the sacred by eliminating the buffer zone. The danger is increased if impurities come to be in contact with the holy.

If an individual came in contact with an impure substance (ranging from carcasses to menstruation blood), he himself would become impure and keep this status from one to seven days depending on the importance of the impurity contracted, whether minor or major.<sup>15</sup>

Either type of impurity was permitted in the sense that it did not imply a notion of personal fault or sin. For example, a person next to whom another one dropped dead by accident

<sup>13</sup>J. Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly ‘Picture of Dorian Gray’” *RB* 83 (1976) 392.

<sup>14</sup> Figure 3 is adapted from Jenson’s, *Graded Holiness*, 47. Impurity profanes the holy bringing it down to the mere level of the clean which in turn can be defiled and rendered unclean. The “clean” is the buffer zone between the holy and the unclean.

<sup>15</sup> Major impurities include corpse contamination, leprosy, childbirth (seven days of impurity for male children, fourteen days for females), menstruations and genital discharges. Minor pollutions are generally contracted from external causes such as contact with the carcasses of animals.

was not guilty of any fault since this was a natural occurrence. Yet because of his proximity to the corpse, he would become impure for seven days. This type of impurity was not dangerous, *per se*. The usual negative side-effect was isolation from others, holy precinct and sacred objects, in order to prevent contamination since all these could be defiled by mere contact.<sup>16</sup> Because the real danger of major impurities resides in their contagiousness, the impure person was relegated to the realm of the profane where his status could do no harm and present no danger to himself, the community and the realm of the sacred.

One type of impurity drastically differed from the permitted, major and minor, impurities. This type of impurity involved a clear notion of transgression and therefore purposeful wrongdoing and was punished by *karet*.<sup>17</sup> The deeds that lead to the *karet* sanction were “acts against the fundamental of Israelite cosmology; in particular, acts that blur the most vital distinction in the Israelite classificatory system, the separation of the sacred and the profane.”<sup>18</sup> Prohibited impurities also included acts of serious apostasy: Necromancy, idolatry, and Molech sacrifices.<sup>19</sup>

## **Pollution of the Sacred**

Permitted impurities, benign *per se*, only polluted the individual for a certain amount of time, yet they could become extremely dangerous if the purification rites were delayed or if the

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<sup>16</sup> Milgrom, “Israel’s sanctuary,” 392, even argues for remote contagion. For him the sanctuary was like the picture of Dorian Gray, reflecting the impurity of the Israelites. Individual impurity (whether major or minor) pollutes the courtyard altar, the inadvertent misdemeanor of the high priest or the community pollutes the shrine, and unrepented sins pollute the Holy of Holies. Since different parts of the sanctuary absorbed the people’s sin and became impure, there was a need for purgation through sacrifices.

<sup>17</sup> The etymology of *Karet* sanction is *nkrt*, which means to “cut off.” See D. Wold, “The *karet* Penalty in P: Rationale and Cases” *SBLSP* (Missoula: Scholar Press, 1979) 1-46. *Karet* offenses were punished by death, the guilty individual and his descendents being *nkrt* (or “cut off”) by an automatic action of God

<sup>18</sup> T. Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 404.

<sup>19</sup> See Lev 20:27, Deut 13:7-12; 17:2-7, Lev 20:2-6.

period of isolation was not respected. Delaying purification intensified and therefore aggravated impurity. If the rules of isolation imposed on impurities were ignored, these impurities became a “father of uncleanness” able through contagion to produce “offspring,” or to contaminate others. As D.P. Wright notes, “the number of ‘fathers of impurity’ is quite limited but with the ability of extended propagation the number of possible impure condition is quite large.”<sup>20</sup>

Different types of impurities could defile different loci. Prohibited impurities had a wider realm of contagion than did permitted impurities. Delaying purification, for example, not only defiled the impure person but also the sanctuary.<sup>21</sup> Sexual transgressions polluted the individual and the land.<sup>22</sup> Idolatry polluted the person, the land and the sanctuary. Because the impure could defile the sacred, the latter had to be protected.<sup>23</sup> The reason for this is furthered explained by T. Frymer-Kensky:

The protection of the realm of the sacred is of prime importance in Israelite thought in view of the belief that God dwells among the children of Israel. Since he is holy, they must be holy (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26) and must not contaminate the camp, temple, or land in which he lives. The protection of the realm of the sacred is a categorical imperative in Israel: it must be differentiated, not only from the impure, but also from the pure, which serves as a buffer zone between the sacred and the defiling. Violating the distinction between sacred and profane disrupts the entire system.”<sup>24</sup>

If someone in a state of impurity was to approach the sanctuary or the sancta, the sanction of *karet* applied. If prohibited impurities were widespread, the consequences could be catastrophic since the whole community would become isolated from God. The crimes and abominations which were thought to pollute the land, protected by God as his own, and therefore

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<sup>20</sup> D.P. Wright, “Unclean and Clean” (*ABD* 6, 1992) 730.

<sup>21</sup> This can be seen in the fact that *hattāt* sacrifices, the purpose of which was to decontaminate the sanctuary, were required in this type of wrong doing. See Lev 5:2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Sexual transgressions included incest, adultery, homosexuality and bestiality.

<sup>23</sup> The sacred itself is contagious and is “conceived as being virtually tangible, a physical entity, the existence and activity of which can be sensorially perceived.” See Haran, *Temples and Temple-Services*, 176. Avoidance from direct and unauthorized contact with holiness should be observed since it is potentially lethal as illustrated in Num 4:18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Frymer-Kensky “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation,” 404-5.

holy, would cause the expulsion of Israel.<sup>25</sup> The previous inhabitants had themselves been dispossessed of the land because of the abominations they had committed. Hence, pollution of what has been set apart and sanctified can result in alienation from God and produce a collective tragedy such as the exile which is nothing more than a form of impurity purging, a rectification of the holiness spectrum, a purification.<sup>26</sup>

### **Devices to Keep the Holy Pure: The Purging Effect of Rituals**

The separation of the sacred from the profane involves the necessity of definite rites which, if strictly observed, had the effect of purging impurities and restoring the equilibrium of the holiness spectrum. Most pollution could be eradicated through the performance of rituals such as ablutions, sacrifices and isolation which could purify people and places. A regular purgation offering removed impurity and therefore reversed the faulty imbalance to the initial equilibrium set by God as he separated the holy from the profane. Smith argues that rituals, as a corrective measure, represented the creation of a controlled environment, in which things were what they ought to be.<sup>27</sup> As Wright stresses, “the underlying notion is that the effects of sin and impurities have estranged God, so sacrifice is made to rectify these effects and thus reconcile God with those who have sinned or have become severely impure.”<sup>28</sup> Figure 4 illustrates the dynamics of the holiness spectrum and shows how sacrifices could restore the order that had been altered by sins and impurities.<sup>29</sup>

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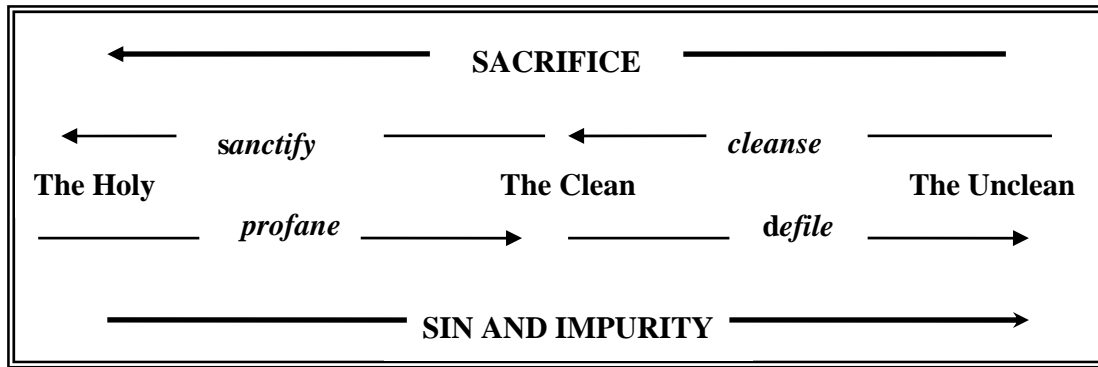
<sup>25</sup>See Ezekiel 36:17.

<sup>26</sup> See Ezekiel 20:38; 22:2-14, 24, 31; 24:11-13; 39:23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *To Take Place*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, “Unclean and Clean,” 738.

<sup>29</sup> Figure 4 is adapted from Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 47.



**Figure 4: The Dynamics of the Holiness Spectrum**

Some impurities, however, could not be “corrected” by rituals. Because prohibited impurities were too severe to be positively affected by ritual purging, they had to be eradicated another way. Elimination of the guilty person and sanctification of the defiled sanctuary could protect the boundaries between the holy and the profane.

Frymer-Kensky mentions that “wrongful acts could cause the pollution of the nation and of the land of Israel, which could also not be entirely ‘cured’ by ritual. There was therefore an ultimate expectation of catastrophic results for the whole people, the ‘purging’ of the land, by destruction and exile.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Devices to Keep the Holy Pure: Physical Boundaries**

Another way to keep the holy from being affected by impurities was to establish strict physical boundaries limiting access to holy space to whoever possessed a matching degree of holiness and purity.<sup>31</sup> The sanctuary, or temple, as God’s dwelling or theophanic locus, needs special protection from contamination. The purity of the temple and the holiness of the people is

<sup>30</sup> Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation,” 399.

<sup>31</sup> The establishment of physical boundaries guaranteed that the sanctuary could not be desecrated by the intrusion of those unauthorized. See. Lev 16:2; 21:21, 23; Num 1:51; 3:10, 38; 16:1-35; Ezek 44:7.

a two-way relationship. Through the spread of impurities and abominations, the people can defile holy space, yet their holiness as a people is also derived from the temple's presence among them.

In sanctuaries, sacred space was zoned, as previously mentioned in the case of the tabernacle, fusing the spatial, personal and ritual dimension. As B. Levine explains, "the demarcation of zones on the basis of graded sanctity...not only served to restrict and control human access but to lend a particular character to certain, more sacred area... This process was clearly expressed in architectural design and the planned use of space, and it correlates with the purificatory rites associated with temples."<sup>32</sup>

Boundaries created by walls, curtains, different levels of elevation, barriers or even more subtle indications such as different materials and fabrics used in construction, would either physically impede access to certain areas or indicate that these areas were out of reach for people not meeting the purity and holiness requirements.<sup>33</sup> These architectural devices not only kept the holy and the profane concretely separated, they also kept impurity in the profane realm to which it belonged.

Since, logically, less people are endowed with a sufficient amount of holiness and purity to approach God, the structural relationship between the zones delimited by boundaries is one of exclusive access. This zoning of gradation, manifest in the principle of concentric circles, is illustrated in both the tabernacle and the temple of Solomon.

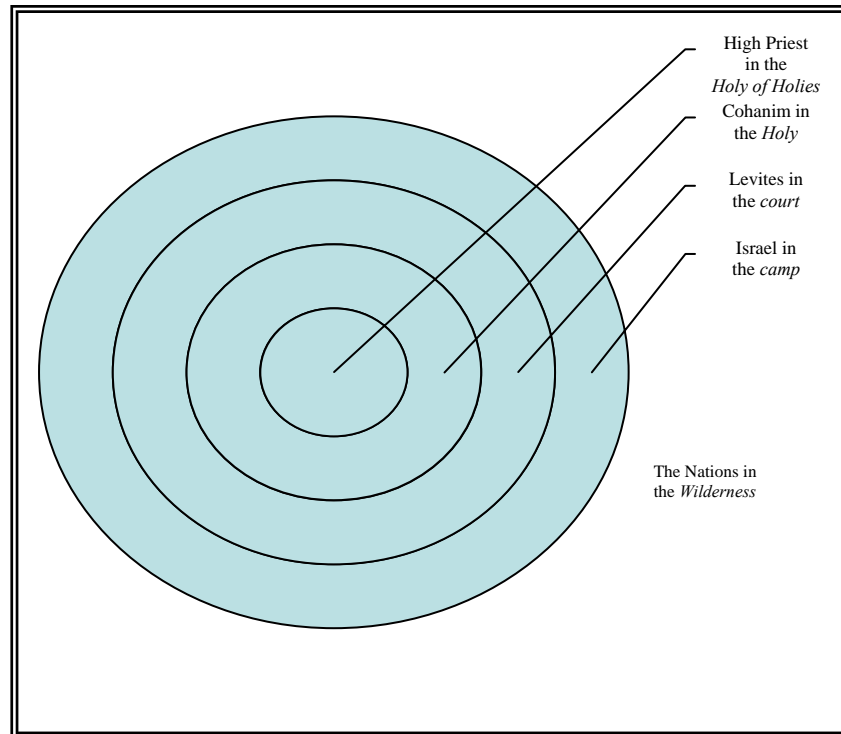
The focal point of these concentric circles arranged in declining order is always the holiest place in which Yahweh dwells and from whence all holiness radiates. Figure 5 illustrates

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<sup>32</sup> B.A. Levine, "Ritual as Symbol; Modes of Sacrifice in Israelite Religion," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Space: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 126.

<sup>33</sup> The tabernacle is a good example for the gradation of material used in construction. The *kappōret* is veiled with a fabric made of a mixture of wool and blue linen with a cherubim pattern (Ex 26:31; 36:35), the outer veil of the tabernacle is also made of mixed blue wool and linen but lacks the cherubim pattern (Ex 26:36; 27:16), and the tent curtain is made of goat's hair (Ex 26:7; 36:14).

the model of sacred space presented in the biblical description of the tabernacle within its natural setting. This model consists of “progressively smaller domains which are opposed one to another on the basis of holiness and purity. Each ring is more exclusive and holy with respect to the ring outside of it, and less exclusive and holy with respect to the ring inside it.”<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 5: Concentric Model of Sacred Space**

In the case of the tabernacle, there are at least two main different concentric circles, the tabernacle (that can itself be separated in two different zones) and the court. The sanctuary itself is surrounded by yet another zone of limited holiness: the camp. Each graded sphere demarcated by these circles is associated with particular personal and ritual dimensions. The temple of Solomon is itself enclosed in two concentric courts, the temple court, and the greater court,

<sup>34</sup> Figure 5 is adapted from Kunin, *God's Place in the World*, 13. The quote is by Kunin, *God's Place in the World*, 14.



though it seems that at one point the temple was only surrounded by one court.<sup>35</sup> This concentric zoning of holy space provides a safe amount of buffer-zones between the holy and the profane, thereby protecting the holy from possible desecration.

## **Summary of Chapter Two**

As shown in this chapter, the holy is what is transcendent or has been separated by God from the realm of the profane and has therefore acquired an elevated status. Whether in the personal or in the spatial dimension, a certain amount of buffer zones protects the holy from the profane and thus filters the pollution of impurities which would have devastating effects if it were it to desecrate the holy.

Pollution can be eradicated from the holy through rituals, the purpose of which is to restore the equilibrium installed by God. It can also be prevented spatially by a careful zoning of sacred space. A concentric gradation of space, such as the one used in the tabernacle and Solomon's temple, provides an adequate and safe amount of buffer zones between the holy and the profane. This zoning of sacred space in concentric circles is also used in the blueprint of Ezekiel's temple which the next chapter will address.

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<sup>35</sup> See Haran, *Temples and temple-services*, 193.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE EZEKIELIAN BLUEPRINT

In the blueprint for his temple, Ezekiel adheres to the priestly notion of separation between the holy and the profane. The architecture of his temple is arranged around the notion of holy space. Holy space is clearly separated from profane space in a number of different buffer zones, each shielding the supreme level of holiness, that of the Holy of Holies in which Yahweh returns to dwell among his people forever.

In this chapter, I will describe the different types of physical borders which are included in the blueprint and the different concentric zones they delimit. These modified concentric gradations are not to be thought of as physical circles built around the center point of the altar in the center of the inner court. Rather the whole temple is oriented along an eastern axis and the true focal point is the Holy of Holies at the further west end of the complex.

The mapping of the blueprint includes the temple and the temple complex located in the *těrûmâ* (or “contributed portion”) itself located in the land of Israel. The general layout is confused by the fact that the vision starts with the temple complex, slowly zooming in on the Holy of Holies until Yahweh returns, and only then does it zoom out to include the “contributed portion” and the land. To clarify the general layout I will start from the outer concentric circle, the land, and end with the Holy of Holies, the inner concentric circle, instead of following the spatial “chronology” of the temple vision.

## The Guide and Measurements

Ezekiel is guided in his vision by a supernatural being described as a man whose appearance shines like bronze and whose purpose it is to introduce the prophet to all the different parts of the complex by measuring them with a reed measuring six long cubits, or about ten feet. To facilitate the understanding of the blueprint and the parallels that have to be drawn between the dimensions of different buildings, I will give all measurements in terms of cubits, approximately 21 inches, even when they are expressed in terms of “reeds” in the text.

In the temple complex, measurements are only given in terms of a ground plan. Oddly, the vision, which emphasizes height delineation as a way to separate holier space from more profane space, lacks any kind of height measurement.<sup>1</sup> Reading the passages describing the temple complex, devoid of height precision, we do not get the image of a building rising up, but rather that of a ground plan, a plane surface, as if Ezekiel, instead of visiting a physical temple, was merely describing an already drawn blueprint he had in front of him. This furthers the idea already expressed in the introduction of this thesis that the temple never was to be built.

Most measurements given for the temple complex as well as for the “contributed portion” are multiples of twenty-five. This number is repeated with such insistence that it cannot be ignored, and yet it does not emerge as having a very strong religious connotation anywhere else within the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> The most probable explanation is that this number follows the numerical pattern introduced in the date of the vision: twenty-five years after the exile. A religious connotation is attributed to this extent of time solely by the fact that it is related to fifty.

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<sup>1</sup> The only height measurements given are those of the outer wall and of the doorway leading to the Holy of Holies.

<sup>2</sup> Zimmerli argues that the number twenty-five might have some connection with the measurement of the House of the Forest of Lebanon (1 Kgs 7:2) which depth, one hundred cubits long, and width, fifty cubits wide, were also multiples of twenty-five. See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:344.

Fifty has a clear relation with the year of Jubilee.<sup>3</sup> This year, which came at the end of a cycle of seven Sabbatical Years, was the year of release. Israelites who had enslaved themselves as a repayment of debt would regain their liberty and those who had sold their land out of economical necessity recovered it.<sup>4</sup> These two themes, liberty and restoration of land, are a clear and hopeful reference to the end of the exile.

### **Different Types of Physical Borders**

The Holy of Holies where Yahweh dwells is protected by buffer zones restricting access on the basis of degree of holiness and purity. These buffer zones are delimited by three different types of borders which also serve to socially place the different group involved in the rituals of the temple. As Smith stresses, these groups “operate in different spheres of relative sacrality ranked in relation of power.” The first type of border comprises physical obstructions: either walls, buildings, flights of stairs or large stretches of empty space. The second type consists of increasing elevation. In the temple complex, each restricted space leads to a higher one that is more exclusive. Smith explains that “we should picture the hierarchy of places not as concentric circles on a flat plane but instead as altitude markers on a relief map. Each unit is built on a terrace, spatially higher than that which is profane in relationship to it.” The third type of border is an increasing level of difficulty of access. This is represented by such devices as the escalating numbers of steps from one area to the next, and the shrinking of doorways as one get closer to the Holy of Holies.<sup>5</sup>

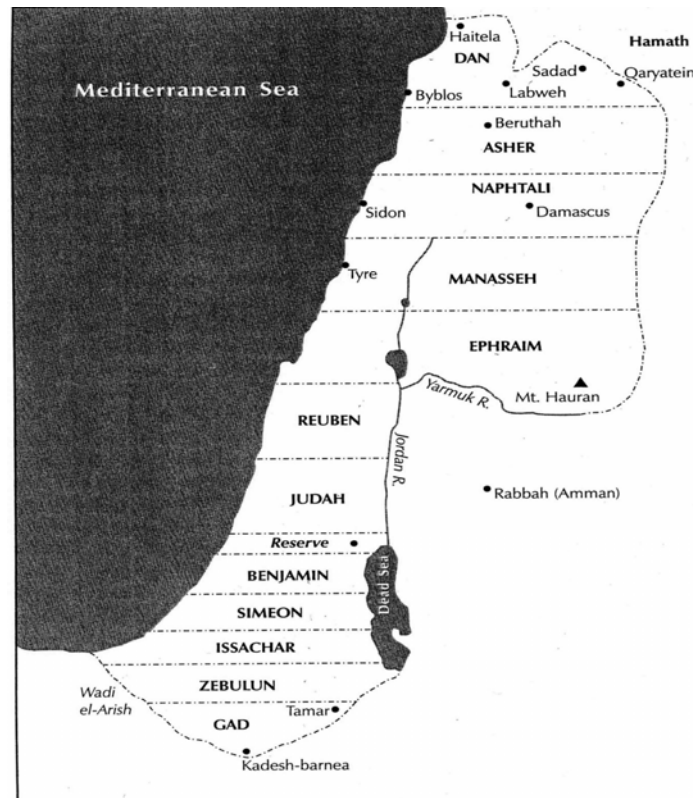
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<sup>3</sup> The year of Jubilee is mentioned in Leviticus 25:8-10.

<sup>4</sup> The year of release would come either every 50 or 49 years. See C.J.H. Wright, “Jubilee” (ABD 3, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *To Take Place*, 57.

## The Land (One or Three Gradations of Holiness)



**Figure 6: Ezekiel's Vision of the Land**

As shown in Figure 6, in Ezekiel's vision the land of Israel is the outer concentric circle.<sup>6</sup> The land, divided into equal shares, is granted by Yahweh to the twelve tribes of Israel. Seven tribes receive a northern share: Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben and Judah. The remaining tribes, Benjamin, Simenon, Issachar, Zebulun and Gad, receive a southern share.<sup>7</sup>

This first concentric circle might actually contain three different zones of graded holiness. At the further end of the country, farthest from the sanctuary, are the shares of the tribes descendent of Jacob and the handmaidens. Closer to the sacred area, bordering it on either side

<sup>6</sup> Figure 6 is taken from Block, *Ezekiel*, 711.

<sup>7</sup> The layout of the land in Ezekiel is not historically accurate. Formerly northern tribes such as Issachar, Zebulun and Gad are here located in the south and Judah is located north of Benjamin. See Block, *Ezekiel*, 722 for other inaccuracies.

are the tribes descending from the primary wives of Jacob. Adjoining the sacred area on either side are the royal tribes of Judah and Benjamin.<sup>8</sup>

This sharing of the land appears utterly unrealistic. By the time of Ezekiel's vision, the twelve tribes had been divided for almost 400 years. The ten northern tribes had been "lost" in the Assyrian empire for over two centuries and the Judahites were themselves in exile in Babylon. In the allocation of the land in the prophet's vision, the tribes of Israel are once again united as a house. Block explains that this mapping is symbolical: "Ezekiel hears a promise that the curse of intertribal alienation, separation from Yahweh and exile from the land would be reversed. The command to apportion the land symbolizes the culmination of Israel's rehabilitation."<sup>9</sup> The mapping out of the land symbolizes the fact that Israel will be given a chance at a new beginning.

### **The *Těrûmâ* and the Share of the Prince (Three Gradations of Holiness)**

In the middle of the land is the thirteenth share which includes the *těrûmâ* or "contributed portion" bordered on two sides by the share of the prince. As Figure 7 shows, the section of the land attributed to the *těrûmâ* is a perfect square, 25,000 cubits on each side.<sup>10</sup> Within this square are three horizontal strips of land. The center portion is 10,000 cubits long and, as the holiest part of the portion, it is attributed to the Zadokites and contains the temple complex. Bordering it on the north is the portion of the Levites which is also 10,000 cubits long. Bordering it on the south is the portion of the city, 5,000 cubits long. This square is bordered on the east and the west by the portion of the prince, 25,000 cubits long and of unknown width. The three gradations are: the

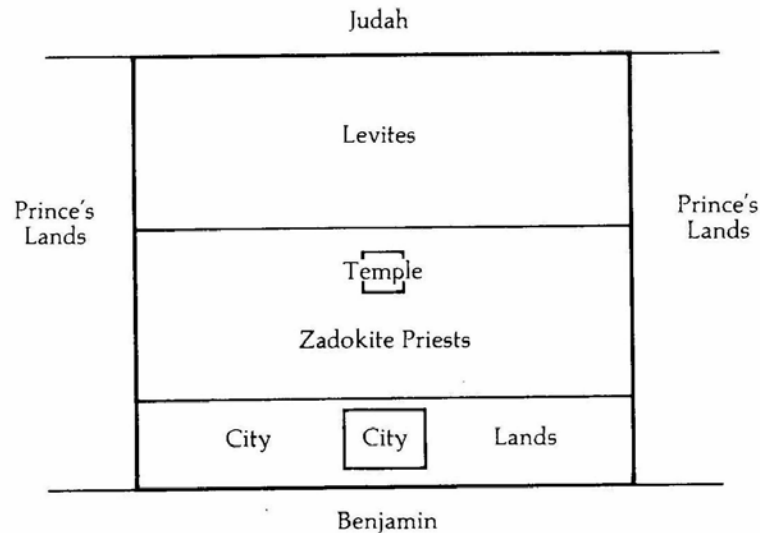
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<sup>8</sup> In the vision the status of royalty is unclear, at times downplayed, at others exalted.

<sup>9</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 709.

<sup>10</sup> Figure 7 is taken from Smith, *To Take Place*, 67.

share of the prince, that of the Levite and the city, and in the center, the holiest portion, reserved for the Zadokite Priesthood.



**Figure 7: The Contributed Portion or *Tērûmâ***

Block argues that the “contributed portion” at the heart of the country symbolizes the locus of power and that “the sanctity of Yahweh and his temple is the driving force behind this territorial legislation.”<sup>11</sup>

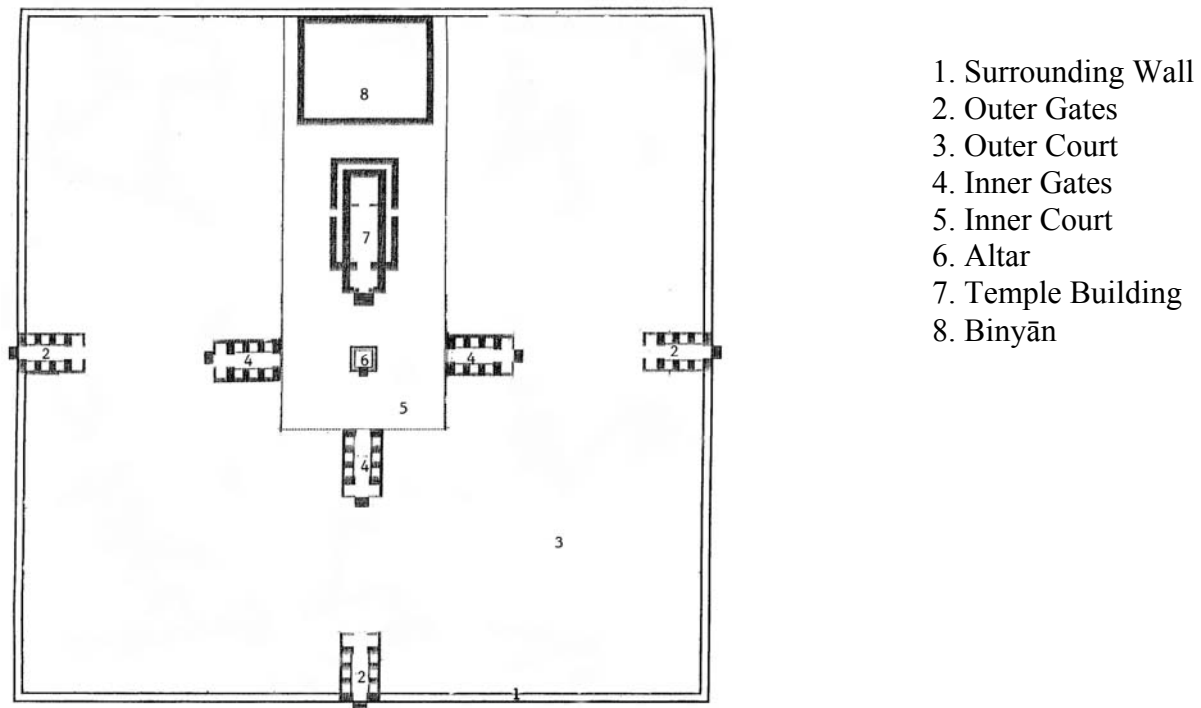
### **The Holiest Portion and the *Migras* (Two Gradations)**

The holiest portion is that of the Zadokites, the priests who mediate with God on behalf of society. It contains the temple, lies at the center of the *tērûmâ*, and as previously mentioned is protected on all sides: on the north by the share of the Levites; on the south by the share of the city; and on both east and west by the share of the prince. Within this portion is the temple complex surrounded by yet another buffer zone, the *Migras*, an empty stretch of land fifty cubits deep which acts as a protective no-man’s land.

<sup>11</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 653.

## The Outer Wall and the Temple Complex (One Gradation)

The temple complex is located on the southern slope of an extremely high mountain, symbolizing an increased degree of holiness. As Smith points out, “with respect to that which is down the mountain, or off the mountain (namely, the profane), the top of the mountain is the undifferentiated and oppositional sacred, a place of dangerous access.”<sup>12</sup> As shown in Figure 8, the temple complex’s total measurement is 500 square cubits.<sup>13</sup> It is a perfect square and its shape and size “reflect a lofty theology and spiritual ideal, according to which the residence of Yahweh must be perfectly proportioned.”<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 8: The Temple Complex**

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *To Take Place*, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Figure 8 is adapted from Block, *Ezekiel*, 508.

<sup>14</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 570.



The structure's most immediate distinctive feature is its surrounding wall, six cubits high and six cubits thick. One usually expects a wall to be higher than it is thick. The architectural implausibility of this wall once again points to the fact that the blueprint should not be taken literally. This first defensive boundary separates the holy from the profane, thus defining sacred space and limiting access. As Block notes:

It is not constructed to keep enemy forces out, if by these forces one means human foes of Israel, but to protect the sanctity of the sacred area from the pollution of the common touch and to prevent the contagion of holiness from touching the people. (It) guarantees that the violence done to Yahweh's torah and the profanation of things sacred [...] never occurs again. In the past priests had failed to maintain the distinction between the holy and profane, but the present structure guards against such abominations under the new order.<sup>15</sup>

No foreigner can enter the temple complex. The house of Israel has been charged with the abomination of having previously admitted foreigners to the sanctuary and thus having broken the covenant (44:7). The participation of foreigners in the service of the sanctuary, as it was done in the first temple, is seen by Ezekiel as a desecration of space.

### **Inside the Temple Complex: The Outer Court (One Gradation)**

The outer court is accessible by three gates opening into the surrounding wall. These gates are accessible by seven steps, and since no descending steps are mentioned on the other side of the gates, it can safely be assumed that the outer court is on a terrace. One hundred cubits span from one outer gate to the corresponding inner gate. This first area of the temple complex which excludes all foreigners, is heavily delimited, both by the physical boundary of the wall and the elevation of the court. The laity is admitted in the outer court only. The outer court is also the

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<sup>15</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 570-1.

realm of the Levites who have a privileged access to the inner gates but are barred from the inner court.

### **Inside the Temple Complex: The Inner Court (One Gradation)**

The inner court, also located on a terrace, is one hundred cubit square. It is also reachable by gates to which one accedes through a flight of eight steps. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the inner court is higher up from the outer court than the outer court is from the *Migras*. The extra step necessary to reach the inner court illustrates that access to this area is more restricted. As we will see later, a matter of current scholarly debate is whether or not the inner court was also delimited by an enclosing wall.<sup>16</sup> Such a wall is not mentioned in the text and does not seem to be necessary to emphasize a restricted status since the exclusivity of the inner court is stressed by its elevation and the extra step one has to climb in order to reach it.

In the center of the court stands the sacrificial altar. This area is the exclusive realm of the Zadokite priests who are in charge of the altar and can come close to Yahweh. Heavy restrictions apply to them in order to keep the holiness of the place undefiled.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Temple (One Concentric Gradation, Three Successive Ones)**

As illustrated in Figure 9, the temple building, at the further western side of the temple complex, is a tripartite structure preceded by two pillars.<sup>18</sup> The difficulty of access is heightened since the temple itself is reachable by ten steps.<sup>19</sup> The vestibule, hall and Holy of Holies are not

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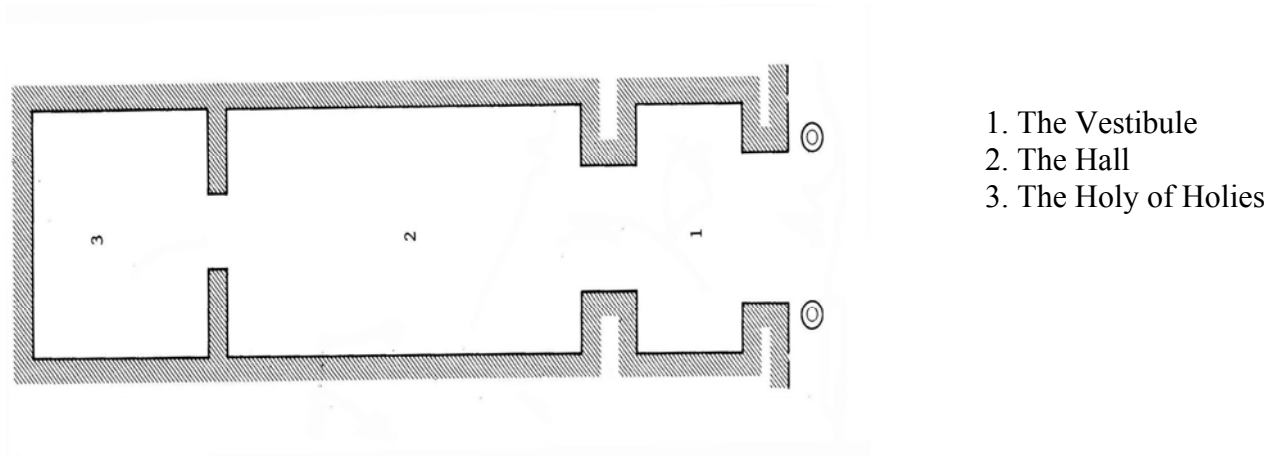
<sup>16</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2: 360 and Block, *Ezekiel*, 571 argue for an enclosing wall, Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 44, argues against it.

<sup>17</sup> See Ezekiel 44:17-31.

<sup>18</sup> Figure 4 is adapted from Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 357. The pillars mentioned in front of the Ezekielian temple are certainly Jachim and Boaz, though they are not named.

<sup>19</sup> When the ten steps leading to the temple are added to the seven steps leading to the outer court and the eight steps leading to the inner court, we end up with a total of twenty-five steps for the whole temple complex.

arranged in concentric order but in a sequential fashion. Each room is twenty cubits wide. The vestibule of the Ezekielian temple, which is twelve cubits deep, is so open that it cannot really be envisioned as an enclosed room.



**Figure 9: The Temple Building**

The hall, which is forty cubits deep, is barely described. Block justifies this absence of details as reflecting “the primary rhetorical concern to define sacred space, not to provide a blueprint for a construction project.”<sup>20</sup> The Holy of Holies’ depth only is only twenty cubits. The Holy of Holies is, as its name indicates, the holiest place of the temple, and even the prophet is not allowed to enter it.

In his description of the temple building, Ezekiel is using a roughly familiar structure for his audience. Solomon’s temple was also twenty cubits wide, the hall was forty cubits long, and the Holy of Holies twenty cubits long. There was no enclosed vestibule *per se*, but a ten cubit deep open porch preceded the structure.

<sup>20</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 543. For a description of the rites performed within the hall, see Haran, *Temples and Temple-Services*, 208-20.

The limited access to the throne of Yahweh is emphasized by the narrowing of the doorways. The entrance to the vestibule of the temple is fourteen cubits wide, the entrance to the temple hall is ten cubits wide, and the entrance to the throne room is six cubits wide. Correspondingly, the side walls by the doors grow wider and as Smith mentions, “the pattern of steps and ascent has yielded to that of a funnel with increased need for caution.”<sup>21</sup> The side walls also grow thicker, the outer wall leading to the vestibule is five cubits thick, and the one leading from the vestibule to the hall is six cubits thick. Where one would expect a thickening of the wall between the hall and the Holy of Holies, the thickness falls down to two cubits. The wall separating the Holy of Holies is thin and does not fit with this pattern of increasing thickness, yet it is sufficient protection for anyone familiar with the Solomonic temple which only had a wooden partition between the hall and the Holy of Holies.<sup>22</sup> Ezekiel purposefully links his sanctuary with the Solomonic temple, yet he alters this familiar structure and further protects the holiness of Yahweh with a two cubits thick stone wall. As Zimmerli notes:

New elements mingle with recollections of the old, of the form of the Solomonic temple and of the Solomonic city. In the old elements, which are ratified for the prophet in the vision, there is confirmed the word of faithfulness on the part of Israel’s God who does not allow what he has once begun to be torn down. In the new, to which everything is transformed, can be heard the call to depart from what was once sinful and evil and displeasing to God.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, *To Take Place*, 57.

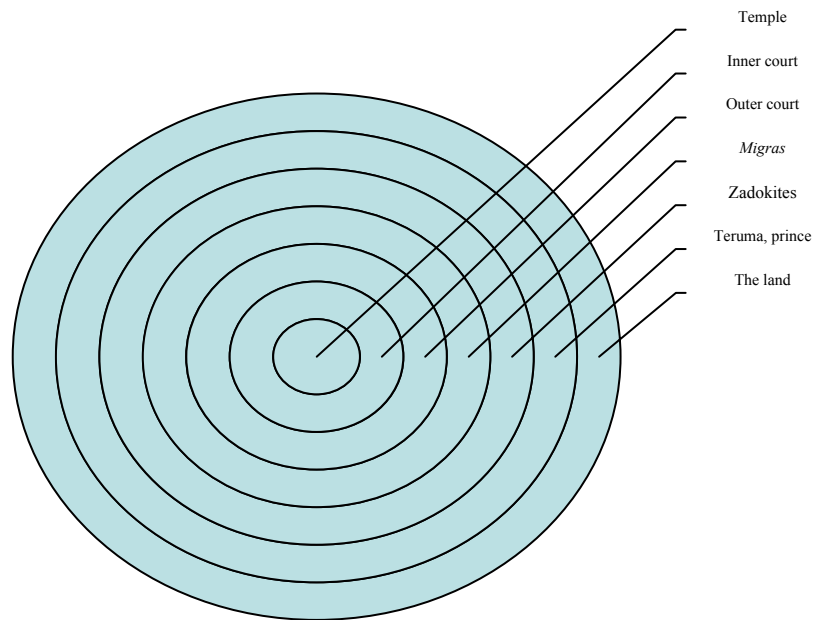
<sup>22</sup> The wooden partition separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple is not included in the measurements of the Solomonic temple and there is therefore no way to know how thick it was. The Herodian temple only had a curtain as a separation between the two rooms.

<sup>23</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:361.

The elevation of the temple and the shrinking of doorways as well as the thickening of the partition walls show that the nature of the structure reflects “a continued concern to guard the sanctity of the temple.”<sup>24</sup>

### Summary of Chapter Three

As shown in this brief discussion of the layout of the temple within its environment, the Holy of Holies is the culminating area in a series of concentric zones of increasing holiness which are “elaborated in a series of segmentations characteristic of sacred/profane hierarchies. With respect to the temple mount, the land is profane; with respect to the temple, the temple mount is profane; with respect to the throne place, the temple is profane.”<sup>25</sup> Figure 5 describing the concentric zoning of the tabernacle in the preceding chapter can be relabeled thus for the Ezekiel vision.



**Figure 10: Concentric Zoning for the Ezekielian Blueprint**

<sup>24</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 544.

<sup>25</sup>Smith, *To Take Place*, 56-57.

Within the temple complex, one goes from the *Migras* to the outer court and from the outer court to the inner court by means of two sets of three gates located at the east, north and south. Since these gates represent a possible weakness in the apparent foolproof impurity protection of the temple, they will be the focus of the next three chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE GATES OF THE EZEKIELIAN TEMPLE

Each architectural item of the Ezekielian temple complex can be seen as a device to delimit holy space and hinder one's way to the highest level of holiness, the Holy of Holies in which Yahweh dwells. Features such as walls, barriers and different levels of elevation are concrete obstructions to be overcome. Others such as doors, stairs and passageways appear to be paths of entry, means of access through the aforementioned boundaries, but they are actually efficient filters, converting themselves into obstacles when needed and thus barring the way to impurity coming in and to the potential lethal contagiousness of holiness coming out. The primary function of the gates is, thus, to ensure the maintenance of boundaries between the holy and the common and to control access from one area to the next.

All gates, which Ezekiel dedicates the greater part of chapter 40 describing, are modeled on the prototype of the outer eastern gate.<sup>1</sup> Architectural features are described at great length for this first gate and, in an unspoken assumption that the gates are symmetrical, are only briefly reiterated in the description of the other structures.

There are six gates altogether: three outer gates (east, north and south), granting access to the outer court, and their three inner counterparts which slightly differ in orientation and open into the inner court. In this chapter, I will describe the architecture of the six gate-buildings

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<sup>1</sup> Thirty verses out of forty-eight are dedicated to the purely physical description of the gates; namely vv. 6-16 for the outer east gate alone, v. 19 for the distance between the outer and inner gates, vv. 20-23 for the outer north gate, vv. 24-27 for the outer south gate, vv. 28-31 for the inner south gate, vv. 32-34 for the inner east gate and vv. 35-37 for the inner north gate. The eastern gate is chosen as the archetype because of the role it holds in the theology of the blueprint. Since the next chapter will deal with this matter in details, it will suffice now to mention only that Yahweh left the sinful temple after its destruction on an eastward direction and used the same path to return.

allowing entrance to the outer and inner courts of the complex. I will show how the similarity between these gates and the military gates found in Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer stresses their defensive nature. I will then attempt to explain the odd orientation of the inner gates, with their inverted vestibules, as well as the outer gates' function as possible crowd control devices.

### **The Outer Gates: Six Parts Structures**

Gates are by their very nature “the soft spot of any system of fortification.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, ultimately, the whole defensive system of the temple complex depends on the reliability of the gates, and the reader should not be surprised at the amount of text dedicated to their description. The size of the gate-houses reveals their importance in the temple complex: the gates are enormous structures, twenty-five cubits wide and fifty cubits deep, and, as Block argues, they “reflect the sanctity of the territory within and the seriousness with which access to sacred space must be controlled.”<sup>3</sup> They are huge because they are “the first line of defense against unauthorized entry.”<sup>4</sup> The outer gates, which project in the outer court, are physical apertures opening into the surrounding wall whose purpose it is to guard the sacral area and establish a first separation between the common and the holy.

These unbuildable gates, which act as sieves, are actually a composite of different filtering features. As Stevenson points out, “the gates not only are boundary structures, they also have inner boundaries which control access within the gates.”<sup>5</sup> As illustrated in Figure 11, the measuring sequence for the eastern gate and all subsequent gates describes the six parts of the

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<sup>2</sup> Y. Yadin, *Hazor: Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible* (New York: Random House, 1975)135.

<sup>3</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 523.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation* 45.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 45.

<sup>6</sup>Figure 11 is adapted from Block, *Ezekiel*, 520.



structure: stairs, doors, first threshold, recess-room, inner threshold, and vestibule.<sup>6</sup> Each individual feature acts as a buffer space which can grant access to the next filtering feature and eventually to the court and to a relative closeness to Yahweh.

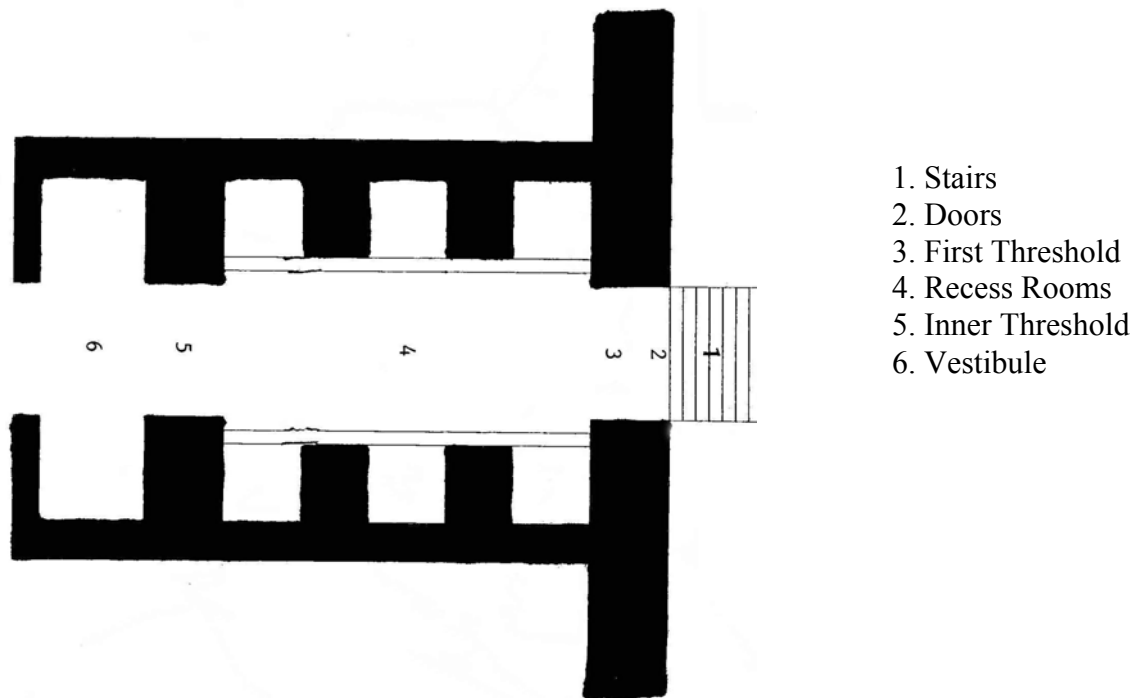


Figure 11: General Layout of the Outer Gates

### The Stairs of the Gates

The outer gate structures are preceded by a flight of stairs with seven steps.<sup>7</sup> This numerical indication is not provided for the eastern gate. It is mentioned in the description of the outer north gate and reiterated for the outer south gate. Gatehouses are usually symmetrical in relation with one another, and, knowing Ezekiel’s predilection for stern evenness, it can be assumed that the same amount of steps also grants access to the outer east gate.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Along with pillars and windows, steps are not measured, but they are counted.

<sup>8</sup> On the symmetry of the gates see Yadin’s “half job” in *Hazor*, 136. Yadin explains how gates are usually such symmetrical structures that unearthing one gate of a defense system is sufficient to know the shape of the others.

Within the complex, these stairs are the first notion of architectural elevation that is presented to the reader. Though no detailed height is given, the reader is nevertheless aware that the way to the *Kābôd* Yahweh is upward.

### **The Doors of the Gates**

The stairs give way to the first threshold by means of a double-leaf door. In the temple complex, doors are important filters. As is mentioned in the preceding chapter, in the case of the tri-partite temple building, as one gets closer to the Holy of Holies, doors get narrower, further reducing access to the *Kābôd* Yahweh.

The description of the gates' doors is textually problematic. Ezekiel 40:11 informs the reader that the width of the door aperture is ten cubits, and yet the width of the gate opening is thirteen cubits. The discrepancy between these two data has been reconciled by H. Gese: the whole width of the passageway is thirteen cubits and the door-leaves themselves are ten cubits.<sup>9</sup> The divergence between the two measurements can be solved by the supposition that the three extra cubits account for the combined dimensions of the hinges and the thickness of the doors once they are pushed open. The text does not give any precision as to where exactly the hinges would be placed within the doorframe.

### **The First Threshold of the Gates**

The first room of the gates, *per se*, is a six cubit deep threshold. The width of the threshold is not mentioned, but it can be deduced. If the width of the gate's opening, amounting to thirteen cubits, is added to the thickness of the enclosing wall bordering the outer gates, six

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<sup>9</sup> H. Gese, *Der Verfassungsentwurf des Ezechiel (kap. 40-48) Traditionsgeschichtlich Untesucht*, BHTh 25 (Tübingen: Moh, 1957) 125.

cubits on both sides, the total inside width for the threshold is 6+13+6, or twenty-five cubits. This width is to be applied to the rest of the gate structure.

### **The Recess Room of the Gates**

Following the first threshold, through the center of each gate, is a twenty-five cubit long corridor lined on each side by three bays. This room is of utmost importance since it is literally a fortress of its own. The bays lining the corridor have a defensive function; guards are supposed to station in them and even windows are portrayed as quasi-hermetical. This corridor is described as *tā'* and W. Von Soden views it as an Akkadian loan-word which he translates as “recess-like rooms or rooms like recesses.”<sup>10</sup> Each of the six alcoves lining the corridor is six cubits wide and six cubits deep. These recesses are separated from one another by “pilasters,” or side walls, five cubits wide and six cubits deep. Nothing is said of the function of these recesses, possibly because Ezekiel’s audience was already familiar with them since they were a common feature in martial city gates.

A “barrier,” *gēbûl*, one cubit on either side, separates each row of alcoves from the corridor and thus serves as a boundary marker to define the space of the recesses. This architectural feature is somewhat obscure and enigmatic. The Biblical text is not sufficient to define its form, and scholars, therefore, have been left to deductions.

Two details mentioned by Ezekiel might help get a clearer view of this *gēbûl*. In Ezekiel 40:13, the text provides measurements for the inside width of the gates. Differing from all other measurement-taking procedures, this one is not taken at ground level. Curiously, Ezekiel’s guide has to take this measurement at the level of the ceiling, yet the ceiling is not described in any

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<sup>10</sup>W. Von Soden, “Akkadisch *ta'û* und Hebräisch *tā'* als Racembezeichnungen,” *WO* 5 (1950) 361.

way nor are any height measurements provided. Why would the prophet's heavenly guide suddenly alter his mode of measuring activities which until then had been the guiding thread of the vision? The only reason for this measurement to be given at roof-level would be that the measuring activity could not be done at ground-level, possibly because of an obstacle.

If a *gēbûl* is an obstacle on the ground, its exact shape or function still has to be determined. Von Soden sees it as “a railing projecting from each pillar, one cubit into the recess or a wooden partition.”<sup>11</sup> Galling argues in terms of a “raised pavement,” in other words, the floor of the recess rooms would be higher than the floor in the corridor.<sup>12</sup> This elevation, however, is not mentioned by Ezekiel. In the vision, altitude is one of the guiding threads on the way to the *Kābôd* Yahweh. Such elevation, emphasizing increasing degrees of holiness, is linear and a side elevation would detract from it.

The word *gēbûl* is also used by the prophet in the description of the altar. In this case, it clearly refers to a low ledge which prevents the blood and water from flowing from the altar out into the inner court. It can be assumed, therefore, that the *gēbûl* in the recess room is also a ledge one cubit thick and one cubit wide. Since Ezekiel is not fond of giving measurements of height, the height of the barrier is left to the imagination. As will be explained later, these side rooms were used as guard-rooms in city-gates fortifications. The barrier could then be imagined as a shielding panel for the guards, behind which they would be protected or even hidden from possible intruders. Zimmerli describes it in a very plausible way as “a barrier wall of half height, which gives protection to the guards but also allows an uninterrupted view of the gateway.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 361

<sup>12</sup> Galling and Fohrer, *Ezekiel*, 230.

<sup>13</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:358.

The recess rooms are lined up with windows through which light enters (40:16). These windows are neither measured nor counted, and their exact location is not clearly indicated. The term used to describe them in the Masoretic Text is “closed windows,” which would not make much sense if the light was to enter through them. The Peshitta expands it as “windows open on the inside, narrow on the outside,” the Vulgate translates it as “slanting windows,” and RSV translates it as “windows with shutters.” M. Noth translates it as “framed windows with bars”<sup>14</sup> and G.R. Drivers as “Narrowed windows” or “Loopholes.”<sup>15</sup> However imprecise and divergent these translations might be, they all seem to stress the same point. These windows are so conceived that nothing else but light can come through. They could be pictured as the kind of slit windows common in defensive towers which allow the defendant to shoot arrows with very little possibility of successful retaliation on the part of the enemy. These windows are another form of device to seal holy space tightly and ward off impurities or at least symbolize the action thereof.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Inner Threshold of the Gates**

Following the recess room and granting access to the vestibule is another threshold. The twin of the first mentioned outer threshold, it is also described as being six cubits deep and twenty five cubits wide.

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<sup>14</sup> M. Noth, *Könige*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1964) 95.

<sup>15</sup> G.R. Driver, “Ezekiel: Linguistic and Textual Problems” *Bib* 35 (1954) 305.

<sup>16</sup> It has been argued by Block (*Ezekiel*, 523) that these windows could refer to niches in the walls which might have held instruments used by temple guards to maintain order within the sacred area.

## **The Vestibule of the Gates**

The last room of the gate, the vestibule, is eight cubits deep and twenty-five cubits wide. Its court-facing exit is enclosed at the front by pillars, two cubits thick, which also serve as outer walls, thus forming a large doorway. There seems to be no door closing the gate on the side of the vestibule. The vestibule will be given a specific importance when the cultic service of the prince will be described in the case of the inner and outer eastern gate.

## **The Inner Gates**

Anyone passing through one of the outer gates would immediately find himself standing in front of a similar but inverted inner gate. Outer gates project inward and inner gates project outward, representing a mirror image of their outer counterparts. Both sets of gates are therefore located in the outer court. As mirror images of the outer gates, the inner gates' vestibules face the outer court, and their thresholds face the inner court. This indicates that their flights of stairs, counting eight steps instead of seven, are in the outer court and give way into their vestibule and not in their first threshold as is the case for the outer gates. The extra step "reflects the ascending importance of the sacred space, and increasing degree of sanctity, as one nears the center of the temple complex, a fact reinforced by the need for two sets of gates."<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the outer gates which are perforations within the surrounding wall, the inner gates are not part of a physical fortification wall. Even though there is no mention of the inner court being surrounded by the same kind of protective wall that surrounds the temple complex, Zimmerli argues for the existence of such a wall since, in his opinion, the gates "only make sense

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<sup>17</sup> Block *Ezekiel*, 530.

as openings in a wall.”<sup>18</sup> Block and L. Allen seem to agree with the contention that the inner wall can be assumed.<sup>19</sup>

However the existence of such a wall is not necessary. The gates are already guarding a separated area, marked by elevation. The inner court, built on a terrace, sufficiently symbolizes an increasing degree of holiness. A wall would therefore be a superfluous luxury to reinforce this point. Furthermore, Ezekiel is usually not shy of repeating the same data over and over again in the description of symmetrical structures in order to emphasize harmony. If he had planned a wall around the inner court he would most likely have mentioned it.

Practically speaking, a wall would be detrimental to the cultus. The altar of sacrifices stands in the inner court, facing the temple. If a wall was to be erected around the inner court, the people would have no visual access to the cult, which would result in a form of estrangement from worship. The presence of a level of elevation stresses the fact that the people are not allowed in the inner court, yet the absence of a surrounding wall shows that, as participating actors, they are allowed to witness the proceeding of the cult. As Stevenson argues, “without a wall, worshipers can see the rituals conducted at the altar in the inner court, and the priests in the inner court can see what is occurring in the outer court below.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Similarity with Military Gates**

The type of gate structure that has been described above has no analogy in the field of typical ancient Palestinian naology, but striking architectural parallels are found in the city gates

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<sup>18</sup> Zimmerli *Ezekiel II*, 355.

<sup>19</sup> Block (*Ezekiel*, 526,528) argues that “an inner wall apparently separated the inner court from the outer, but the absence of any reference to it at least raises the possibility that these gates were symbolic.” See also L. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*. WBC 29 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990) 232.

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 44.

of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer shown in Figure 12.<sup>21</sup> In these cities, similar gate structures were part of the city fortifications and were military in nature.

In 1950, Howie first pointed to Megiddo's north gate, in which a passageway, lined by recesses, bore close resemblance to the recess-rooms described by Ezekiel.<sup>22</sup> The gate of Megiddo was of a smaller format and preceded by projecting defensive towers.

In his excavations at Hazor in 1957, Yadin found a similar structure, a corridor lined by alcoves and also preceded by towers on either side. He then went on to investigate an analogous building in Gezer which had until then been described as part of a "Maccabean castle." On review, this construction turned out to be the western side of an identical gate structure, also containing side rooms and flanked by defensive towers.<sup>23</sup>

The biblical text mentions that Solomon "built" these three cities, or more likely fortified them, yet there are no indications whatsoever that this type of gate was used in the Solomonic temple complex itself. There is however a strong possibility that they had been used in the fortification of Jerusalem since this type of gate was military in function.<sup>24</sup>

Yadin explains the defensive function of the recess-rooms of the city gates, which were used as guard rooms and were forts within themselves. The combination of the side pilasters and the side rooms narrowed down the passageway, which kept enemies' chariots from invading the city *en masse*, yet allowed a defender's chariots to enter in peacetime.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Figure 12 is taken from Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:358.

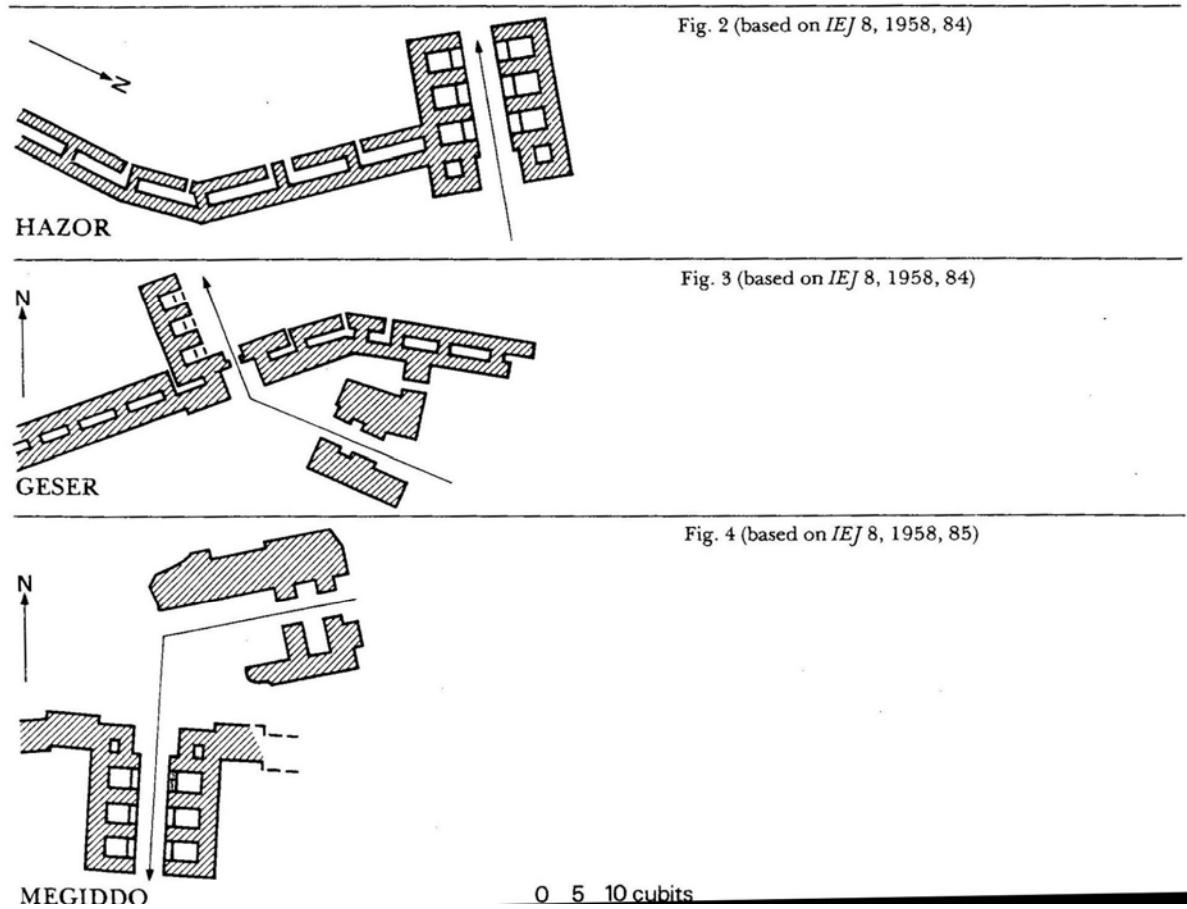
<sup>22</sup> C.G. Howie, "The East Gate of Ezekiel's Temple Enclosure and the Solomonic Gateway of Megiddo," *BASOR* 117 (1950) 13-19.

<sup>23</sup> The type of gate unearthed in Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer was also found at Lachish and Ashdod. See A. Mazar, *Archaeology and the Land of the Bible: 10, 000-586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 384-5.

<sup>24</sup> So, we could assume with Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 2:359) that "since 1 Kgs 9:15 speaks in the same context also of Solomon's building work on the temple and palace, the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem, it is very probable that the type of city-gate which archeologists have found at Megiddo, Hazor (and Gezer?) as structures from the Solomonic period was also used in the development of Jerusalem." Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:359.

<sup>25</sup> Yadin, *Hazor*, 138.





**Figure 12: The Gates of Gezer, Hazor and Megiddo**

The side-rooms and the pillars also served an architectural function: they spanned the inside width of the gate and enabled the construction of the second floor and of the towers.<sup>26</sup>

These towers were an inherent part of the fortifications of the city since they allowed the defender to spot an incoming enemy from afar. These towers which flank the gates of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, are missing in the Ezekielian temple. They must have been purposely omitted by the prophet who has added the vestibules to the familiar structure of the gatehouses.

Stevenson argues that in the case of Ezekiel's temple, towers are not necessary, since "towers are

<sup>26</sup> Yadin, *Hazor*, 138, 195.

not territorial features. They provide means of observation, but not means to control access. Therefore they are not necessary for maintenance of boundaries.”<sup>27</sup>

Because the primary function of these gates is to ensure the right maintenance of boundaries, they have adopted the form and function of Solomonic city gates. They are defensive gates which provided the guards, the Levites, with three recesses on each side of the corridor to keep watch and ward off the enemy: the confusion between the sacred and the profane which would have resulted from unlawful entry. With the omission of the towers and the addition of the vestibule, Ezekiel has adapted a military structure into a cultic one. As Zimmerli argues,

The revolutionary process in the temple vision consists in the fact that this type of city-gate, which is conceived as military protection for the city and can provide for the city-guards a place in the gate recess [...] from which eventually to fight against the enemy attackers, has, in Ezekiel 40, been made into a temple-gate which thus acquires a defensive characteristic.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Meaning of the Inverted Vestibules**

Scholarship on the meaning or function of the inverted vestibules is scarce. Yet, one must wonder why were these gates inverted? Since their contrary orientation is striking, what was gained by having these gates mirror one another? Architecturally, and even metaphorically, as guardians of sacred space, non-inverted gates would have worked just as well. This inversion cannot be a mere accident or the result of a simple whim of the prophet. There has to be a meaning behind their layout.

One of the most obvious reasons for this inversion would have to do with the prince’s mode of worship. As we will see in the next chapter, the outer and inner east gates are the sphere

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<sup>27</sup> Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:359.

of worship of the prince. He enters both gates through the outer court and remains in worship in the vestibule of one or the other depending on the occasion. Because the vestibules are inverted, they are, in both the inner and the outer gate, the first rooms which the prince will enter from the outer court. The prince will then settle in this area of worship without being able to go any further.

This is especially important in the case of the inner gate which can grant a privileged access to the inner court and closeness to Yahweh. If the inner east gate was not inverted, the prince would be able to walk the whole length of the gate in order to reach his given place of worship.<sup>29</sup> This would grant him a level of access to the holy that was obviously not intended by the prophet.

All gates have to be symmetrical. If, for the sake of correct princely worship, there is a need for inverted vestibules in the specific case of the east gate, all gates will have to follow the same pattern of inversion, even though it might have no relevance for the southern and northern gate.

The facing vestibules could also have the same purpose as the mathematical signs  $>$  “greater than” and  $<$  “lesser than.” Israel, in its mixture of holiness and impurity, is contained during worship in the outer court, between these two sets of gates. As far as holiness status goes, they are “greater than” foreigners and, therefore, allowed in the outer court, yet they are “lesser than” Levites and priests and, therefore, they are denied further access. The outer court is the meeting point between the laity and Yahweh, and the facing vestibules emphasize the exchange that takes place between a people and its deity. Through architecture, the prophet is reiterating his message of hope and the people are allowed a proximity to their deity. However, Ezekiel is

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<sup>29</sup> As will be shown in the following chapter, once the *Kābôd* Yahweh has returned, both eastern gates are inaccessible as pathways.

also emphasizing divine prudence in light of the abominations committed in chapters 8-11. Because in the past, Israel has not been able to keep the distinction between the profane and the holy, the people are given, metaphorically, a structure that will naturally impose upon them such a distinction. Between the two sets of gates lies a neutral ground in which a certain amount of holiness and a certain amount of impurity can meet without dangerously affecting one another. Since access to the inner court, which lies right in front of the temple and contains the sacrificial altar, is restricted to the Zadokite priesthood, the vestibules of the inner gates facing the outer court remind the laity coming to worship that they are not allowed further. What they have in front of them is not an entrance but an exit and, in their case, a dead end street signal.

These inverted vestibules, like the rest of the architecture of the temple, impose limitations which Israel was not previously able to meet. Through these limitations will emerge a correct form of worship entailed by the rigid structure that frames it. As Zimmerli mentions, “the gates are not only places of defense but places which summon people to a correct turning towards that which is holy.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Gates as Crowd Control Devices or Solar Worship Prohibition?**

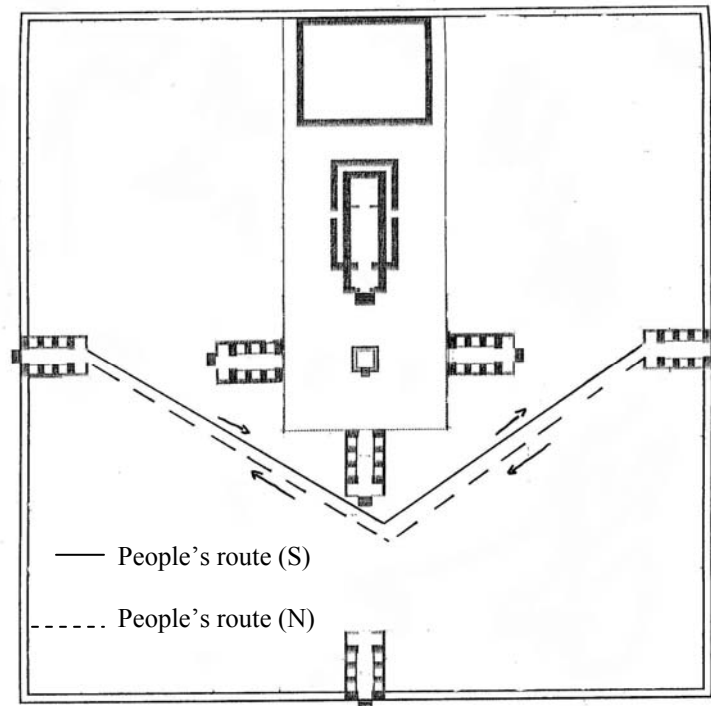
The people can enter the outer court either through the north gate or the south gate. We will see in the next chapter that the east gate is inaccessible and closed forever. As shown in Figure 13, when worshipers enter through the north gate, they have to leave through the south gate and vice versa.<sup>31</sup> No one is allowed to retrace his steps and exit the same way he entered.

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<sup>30</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:362.

<sup>31</sup> Figure 13 is adapted from Smith, *To Take Place*, 71.

This rule might, most pragmatically, serve as a crowd control device in order to prevent congestion in the outer court, thus rendering the flow of worshipers more controllable.



**Figure 13: The Gates as Crowd Control Devices**

However, scholars have considered the possibility of another meaning hidden behind this regulation. For instance, Zimmerli wonders “whether old taboos prohibiting turning around in the sacred precinct are not here ritually consolidated.”<sup>32</sup> Block argues that this regulation might prevent turning one’s back on Yahweh, which could be seen as offensive.<sup>33</sup> Turning one’s back on Yahweh is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:16, which has often been seen as a counterpart to Ezekiel 40-48, in the description of the abomination of sun worship, when twenty-five men turn their back on Yahweh and worship the sun in an eastward direction. “Turning one’s back on Yahweh”

<sup>32</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:492.

<sup>33</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 674.

might be an idiomatic expression to describe any type of idolatrous practice or lack of true Yahweh-worship in the temple.<sup>34</sup> The same type of accusation is used in 2Chronicles 29:6 referring to Hezekiah's reform.

Zimmerli does not believe that Ezekiel 8:16 refers to the worship of a different deity than Yahweh, but rather the worship of the solar aspect of Yahweh:

It is also possible, and even probable, that here these ritual features were not regarded in the mind of those who practiced them as a betrayal of the Yahweh faith, but rather as elements of a possible solar interpretation of Yahweh. It is once again significant for the priest-prophet Ezekiel how he describes the solarized Yahweh worship which he sees. He does not stress the fact that in such worship the sun appears as second Lord beside Yahweh [...] he sees here the particular abomination which offended Yahweh in the infringement of the ordained direction of prayer and the turning of men's back to the lord.<sup>35</sup>

This interpretation is also accepted by H.G. May who suggests that the rites described in 8-11 were lamenting the departure of Yahweh as a solar deity and that the men with their backs to the temple were lamenting the decline of the sun after summer solstice.<sup>36</sup> J. Morgenstern also argues that the practice of facing the east gates is originally a non-yahwistic practice which belonged not only to Ancient Israel but also to Canaan and Babylon and that this practice was not necessarily dedicated to another deity than Yahweh.<sup>37</sup> In 8-11 and in the description of alternate entrance/exit, Ezekiel raises his voice against what he considers an originally non-yahwistic practice. No matter if the deity worshiped so was Yahweh, God should not be worshipped through pagan rituals.

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<sup>34</sup> See J. Morgenstern, "The Gates of Righteousness" *HUCA* 6 (1929) 33.

<sup>35</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:243-44.

<sup>36</sup> H.G. May, "The departure of the Glory of Yahweh," *JBL* 56 (1937)

<sup>37</sup> Morgenstern, "The Gates of Righteousness," 1-37.

If the people were allowed to turn around, they would be able to face east, traditionally the direction in which the sun was worshiped and repeat this abomination. Hence, prohibition of sun worship might be expressed in this entrance/exit regulation.<sup>38</sup> Once again, through structure and regulations, the rules of holiness are imposed on the people. They will not be able to act counter to the architecture of the temple.

### **Unbuildable Gates**

No matter how detailed these gates appear to be, with their precise measurements, they are unbuildable. The by now usual and yet unexplainable absence of height measurements evidently renders the description of the gates useless as a construction blueprint.<sup>39</sup> The total measurements of the gates are also problematic. The total length of the gate, fifty cubits, is measured from the outside and includes the thickness of the walls. Yet the width of the gates, twenty-five cubits, is measured from the inside and obviously does not include the thickness of the walls, which would then have to be paper thin in order to fit within these measurements. At the cost of architectural logic, the symmetry, based on a pattern of multiples of twenty-five, is respected. As J.W. Wevers comments, “in the vision [...] symmetry is more important than realism.”<sup>40</sup>

One of the functions of the recess-room is totally ignored by the prophet. In the gates of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, these rooms had two functions, a defensive one which Ezekiel does adopt, and an architectural one: they allowed the building of a second level and of the defensive

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<sup>38</sup> The closure of the east gate, on which I will dwell in the next chapter, is also a way to bring an end to solar worship.

<sup>39</sup> S.S. Tuell states that we can assume the descriptions are tri-dimensional because the width of the eastern gate is measured from the roof of its chamber, “We are dealing here with a complex three-dimensional structure, even if it is generally measured only in two dimensions. When the height of a structure is not given, we can only conclude that that information was not commended to the prophet’s attention.” S.S. Tuell, *The Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-48* (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1992) 26.

<sup>40</sup> J.W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (London: Nelson, 1969) 299.

towers which are notably absent in the gates of the temple complex. If the gates fulfill their tactical aim, their form is useless as far as architectural purpose goes. The temple gates, which emulate the shape and form of city-gates in order to adopt their defensive function, forgo their architectural reality.

### **Summary of Chapter Four**

The whole purpose of the gate structures is the same as that of the other features of the temple, namely to delimit and protect holy space. These gates, guarded by the Levite priesthood which retains the martial aspect it has in D and P, are not means of access but of defense. Within the architecture of the gates, one can discern a form of judgment on past mistakes and an unspoken blueprint for future worship which will be extended in the next chapter, especially in the case of the prince. The fact that these gates cannot be built becomes irrelevant once one concentrates on the message they have to offer: architecture only underlines a correct form of worship respecting the holiness spectrum installed by Yahweh.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE EAST GATES

The tour of the Ezekielian temple began appropriately at the east gate. As will be shown in this chapter, the east has many connotations in the Ezekielian temple. In the Ancient Near East, it was the usual orientation, the equivalent of the north on our compass and had a definite solar connotation. Because of the importance of this direction the axis of the temple went from east to west. The east was also the way Yahweh left prior to the exile and the way he returned once the temple had been re-consecrated. Finally, it is the only cardinal direction in the temple which does not display a gate at its opposite point.

The eastern gates also have a definite function, which set them apart from the rest of the gates. Once the *Kābôd* Yahweh returns, they lose their purpose as pathways. The outer east gate is physically closed, in a way that could be linked to a polemic on Yahwistic solar worship and/or be reminiscent of Babylonian *Akītu* festivals. The inner gate also becomes inaccessible as a passageway, thus signifying the future permanence of the divine presence. Both outer and inner east gates will also adopt a new role as far as the debated cultic status of the prince is concerned.

#### **Eastern orientation**

The predominance of the eastern gate as a prototype for all other gates is striking. Wevers argues that the east gate is the first to be measured since the east was the usual

orientation and therefore the most important one.<sup>1</sup> In Hebrew, two different groups of words are used to indicate this direction. The first type of words used comes from the root *qdm* which refers to that which is before, or in front of, a person. This reveals that, in the Ancient Near East, in order to get a sense of orientation, a person faced east and deduced the three other cardinal points from this primal direction, just as we would do with the north.

The other word for east used in the Biblical text is *mizvah šemeš*, or the “rising sun,” clearly because the east is the direction of such a phenomenon. This expression was also used to indicate the east in most of the Ancient Near East where solar cults were widespread.<sup>2</sup>

### **Possible Solar Orientation in Emulation of Solomon’s Temple**

In the Ancient Near East, temples dedicated to solar deities were usually oriented towards the direction of the rising sun, the east.<sup>3</sup> The Solomonic temple also faced that direction and Ezekiel has taken up on this orientation for his blueprint, presumably because the pattern of the first temple was too imbedded in the collective religio-cultural background of the exiles (including the prophet himself) to even think of differing from it.

There are in the Bible some rather obvious associations of Yahweh with solar deity or mentions of Yahweh as having solar attributes.<sup>4</sup> M. Smith argues that the sun

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<sup>1</sup> J.W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 299.

<sup>2</sup> See J.F. Drinkard, “East” in *ABD* 2, 248.

<sup>3</sup> See F.J. Hollis, “The Sun-Cult and the Temple at Jerusalem” 87-110 in *Myth and Ritual: Essay on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Culture Pattern of the Ancient East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) 96-99.

<sup>4</sup> See Psalms 19, 104, Gen. 1:14. M. Smith argues that the solar expressions “are not to be seen only as polemic... Rather, the sun serves as a positive sign of order in Yahweh’s creation. Reduced to a sign of

became a component of the personality of Yahweh under the influence of the united monarchy: “It seems to have been a special expression of the Judean royal theology. It expressed and reinforced dimensions of both divine and human kingship. This form of solarized Yahwism may have appeared to the authors of Ezekiel 8 and 2 Kings 23 as an idolatrous solar cult incompatible with their notion of Yahweh.”<sup>5</sup>

The Solomonic temple could have been aligned with the east for at least three different reasons. May argues that the origin of the eastern orientation of the Solomonic temple is not of Israelite but rather of Tyrian origin: “Phoenician workmen had a hand in building the temple of Solomon, and we may be certain that the subject of Hiram of Tyre contributed much of the significant symbolism as it appeared in the architecture of the temple which was modeled at least partially after the temple of Melqart, the sun-god of Tyre.”<sup>6</sup> A second possibility for this orientation rests on the assumption that the Solomonic temple was aligned this way so that on the day of the eclipse the rising sun would shine into the Holy of Holies from over the Mount of Olives.<sup>7</sup>

The most popular theory, however, is that the temple was aligned so that on the two equinoxes of the year (first day of the first month and tenth day of the seventh month of the year), the sun would rise over the Mount of Olives and shine through the eastern gate, over the altar of burnt offering and all the way into the Holy of Holies. This was possibly seen as the entrance of the *Kābôd* Yahweh and as the ritual enthronement of Yahweh as king.

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divine order, solar imagery in these cases represents instances of ‘a harmless sun’.” M. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) 121.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *The Early History of God*, 120.

<sup>6</sup> H.G. May, ‘Some Aspect of Solar Worship at Jerusalem.’ *ZAW* 35 (1937) 269.

<sup>7</sup> The eastern orientation of the temple was a result of the answer Yahweh gave to King Solomon when he sought an oracle from the deity. See 1 Kings 8:53.

While some scholars discount the possibility of a solar origin for the eastern direction of the Solomonic temple, it seems convincing that this orientation of the temple was dictated by a consideration of a solar-like cult.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Eastern Axis**

The axis of the whole temple complex goes from east to west. The eastern gates (the outer eastern gate as well as its inner counterpart) lie opposite the real center of the temple complex which is not, as one might expect, the geographical center of the square, this spot being occupied by the altar, but the temple building itself.<sup>9</sup> This sanctuary is located at the west of the complex, facing east, and reproduces the east-bound orientation of the Solomonic temple.

Within the Ezekielian temple, one of the functions of holy space and restricted access is to impede ultimate access to the Holy of Holies where the *Kābôd* Yahweh resides, and from which all holiness radiates. The Holy of Holies, to which the reader is led through a crescendo of holier space, is at the further west end of the sacred space construct, on this east-west axis. It can therefore be assumed that this western room is the final goal of the tour. The axis of the temple, as a finite portion of a straight line, is protected on all sides. As Smith states: “It is along this central spine, or axis, that all of the sacred transactions of the temple occur. In both legal and ritual terms, it is this axis

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, J.G. Taylor who argues that: “The indirect archaeological evidence of the orientation of analogous structures offers little or no reason to believe that the temple of Solomon was intentionally aligned to the sun as a reflection of cultic practice. While orientation to the sun is not always characteristic of sun temple, the lack of clear orientation to the sun on the part of any Yahwistic cultic structure attested provides no firm indication of the presence of solar elements within the cult.” J.G. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel*, JSOTSup 111 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 86. See also pp. 66-86.

<sup>9</sup> See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 355. Stevenson (*Vision of Transformation*, 40) argues against the centrality of the temple building, stating that the altar as the place of purgation is at the center of holy space.

that may be understood as the ‘god’s house,’ centered on the throne room, marked off to the west by the ‘restricted space,’ to the north and south by the lateral ‘open space’ (*munnah*, Ezekiel 41:9), and frontally by the funnel of entranceways and shifts in height.”<sup>10</sup>

### **The Absence of a Western Gate**

The reader may have noticed the surprising lack of symmetry in the absence of a western gate. The western part of the complex is occupied by the east-facing temple building, behind which lies yet another structure.<sup>11</sup> This structure at the western end of the temple complex is called *Binyān* (either “structure” or “building”). This enormous building, seventy cubits wide by ninety cubits long, further blocks any possible back entrance to the Holy of Holies. Worshipers have no choice but to come in facing the Glory of God, and they can never turn their back on him since the two only available entrances/exits are, alternatively, the northern and the southern gate.

The function of the “building” is open to debate. Zimmerli argues that the text does not give “the slightest indication of the use of this, the most enormous structure of the whole temple area,” because its sole purpose is “to forbid all access to the area behind the temple, that is behind the back of the Lord of the holy of holies who is facing forward, i.e. eastwards.”<sup>12</sup>

Stevenson argues, rather unconvincingly, that the *Binyān* takes the place of the palace since “there is no room for the house of the human king in this territory. This is in

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, *To Take Place*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 2:362) argues that the six gates lead to the seventh structure, the temple, and the Holy of Holies, goal of the Guidance Vision. This pattern is the Ezekielian counterpart to the Priestly creation narrative which culminates in the seventh day.

<sup>12</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:380.

sharp contrast with the Solomonic Temple which set ‘their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them.’ (43:8)”<sup>13</sup>

The *Binyān* might take the place of the palace, yet it would still have no other function than to protect the Holy of Holies from profane encroachment, as Zimmerli rightly argues. With the closure of the eastern gate and the inexistent western gate (replaced by the bunker that is the *Binyān*), the portion of east-west axis upon which lies the temple complex is totally cut off from the common. There is such a thing as a profane east-west axis, and then there is a holy and partial east-west axis, contained within the temple, on the total length of which no one but God can travel. As will be shown subsequently, parts of this holy and finite fragment are accessible by certain members of the community (priests and prince), yet no one can tread its whole length.

### **The Return of the *Kābôd***

In Ezekiel 43:2-4, Yahweh returns via the same path he had used, in the vision the prophet had twenty years earlier, to depart in the eastward direction of Babylon where he could become a “small sanctuary” or “a sanctuary for a little while” for the exiles. Returning from the east, the *Kābôd* enters the temple complex by means of the outer east gate. Ezekiel’s description of the return of the *Kābôd* Yahweh provides a natural conclusion to the temple tour:

The present pattern – the description of the sanctuary followed by the entrance of the divine *kābôd* into the building – follows the pattern of two previous biblical parallels, the construction of the tabernacle (Exod. 25-40) and Solomon’s temple (I K. 6-8). In both instances the arrival of the glory served as a visible seal of Yahweh’s approval on the construction project. God has taken up residence in his palace. But this pattern is also witnessed in extra-biblical parallels. Neo-Assyrians kings tended to take great pains, not only to rebuild ruined temples for the gods, but also to record their achievements. Accordingly, the climax of these

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<sup>13</sup> Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 117.

reconstruction projects occurred when the king would bring the restored images of deities home to their temples[...] these accounts view the return of the deity as the necessary and climatic events of temple-building projects.<sup>14</sup>

Once Yahweh returns to his temple, he announces to Ezekiel, “Mortal, this is the place of my throne and the place for the sole of my feet, where I will reside among the people of Israel forever” (43:17). The return of the *Kābôd* is a guarantee that Israel will not be ostracized any longer from its deity. Yahweh will once again dwell amongst his people in his temple. As Block emphasizes, “the vision of the return of the *kābôd* offers optical reinforcement of verbal pronouncement in earlier salvation oracles (chs. 34-7) that Yahweh will come back and establish his residence among them, never again to leave. Ezekiel’s temple represents a symbol of this commitment.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet this return is not unconditional. Yahweh’s return carries some moral obligations on the part of Israel. Yahweh emphasizes that Israel cannot carry on as prior to the catastrophe of 586 B.C.E. As Block argues, “the one who resides in this holy temple on this holy mountain demands a holy reputation. He will not tolerate an unholy people misrepresenting him before the nations.” The demands of Yahweh are that the house of Israel shall no longer defile his name by their “whoring” or idolatry, and by their kings using the temple complex as a burial site:<sup>16</sup> “Now let them put away their idolatry and the corpses of their kings far from me and I will reside among them forever”(43:9). Yahweh can now come back since the holy space created by the layout of the temple is an assurance of holy behavior on the part of Israel. There is within the complex no space

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<sup>14</sup> Block, *Ezekiel*, 577, 579.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 582.

<sup>16</sup> See Block, *Ezekiel*, 582. The demand that the kings stop using the temple complex as a burial site is odd, since there seems to be no indication that the kings of Israel ever did use the temple ground as a burial site.

for a king's palace or for a royal burial ground and holy space is so delimited that the profane and the holy cannot mix. This leads to the absolute impossibility of reiteration of the past errors which Yahweh describes upon his return.

### **The Closing of the Gate**

In the climax of the temple vision, once Yahweh re-enters his temple, the outer east gate is shut forever. This is the path Yahweh took, and it is forever closed to human traffic. No one can tread behind his majesty. The reader is not given any information concerning how the gate is closed - i.e.- if the entrance is walled up or the doors simply shut. Hence this most sacred gate, the one through which Yahweh came and the one which, through a direct line, would give immediate access to the Holy of Holies, is the most secure of all gates. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, gates, as apertures, are the weakest part of a defense system. The closed outer east gate deprives the east-west path, the sacred axis, of any possible frailty and as aforementioned separates this segment of the axis from the general profane realm.

This closing of the gates is considered by many scholars a Babylonian feature. The Babylonian New Year *Akītu* festival, which was celebrated in the month of Nisan, celebrated the return of Marduk to his city after an exile in the underworld.<sup>17</sup> The ritual opening of the gate was a main feature of this festival. The sacred gate apparently remained closed to human passage all year long and was reopened during the festival to enable Marduk to exit the city and later return in a triumphant procession. The gate was then closed again for the remainder of the year.

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<sup>17</sup> See J. Klein, "Akītu" in *ABD* I: 138-140 and Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:441, for surveys of scholarship.



The exiled community must have been familiar with the *Akītu* festival. This festival could not be ignored since the celebrations lasted twelve days, and included such ceremonies as mock battles, collective wailing, Hieros Gamos, processions carrying statues of deities, recitation of *Enuma Elish*, public humiliation of the king, sacrifices and divination.<sup>18</sup> H. Frankfort describes the atmosphere that must have reigned in the city during these twelve days: “The mood with which the New Year’s festival opened agreed with that of the popular celebrations [...] the commotion also spread outside the city”<sup>19</sup>

After having spent twenty-five years in this city, the exiled community must have been very familiar with this ritual and the cultic opening and closing of gates signifying the departure of Marduk, accompanied by public mourning, and the subsequent return of the deity, celebrated in joy. Ezekiel is here referring to events familiar to the exiled community in order to pass on a message that is supported by the date given for his vision, the tenth day of the seventh month, the New Year day, coinciding with the return of the deity. The innovation of Ezekiel is that the closing of the gates is permanent. It thus answers the question which naturally arises: since this eastern-western path has so far been described as not only a path of entrance but also one of departure, could Yahweh leave his temple again, as he had twenty years before, and condemn once again the land to desolation and the people to exile? The reader is assured that the entry of the deity is final. The doors will not be reopened for a departure of the type described in Ezekiel 11:23, since this will be physically impossible. This is a promise that the tragedy of the exile will not reoccur and it thus points to Yahweh’s loyalty.

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<sup>18</sup> See J.B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955) 331-334 for the full text describing the diverse ceremonies of the *Akītu* festival.

<sup>19</sup> H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1948) 315, 323. See also 313-333 for a complete description of the festival.

Because the New Year day is also the day of the fall equinox, another meaning of the closing of the gate might be found in a pre-exilic Yahwistic rite associated with the sun and tied to the Sukkoth-festival. It appears that, in the Solomonic temple, the eastern gate, which was ordinarily kept closed, was opened so that the rising sun could shine through it into the Holy of Holies.<sup>20</sup> This gate was then solemnly closed in the evening. Morgenstern argues that this ritual was “denounced by Ezekiel as a rite of non-Yahwistic origin and character.”<sup>21</sup> Ezekiel’s reason for the permanent closing of the gate might have been inspired by a desire to put an end to this non-Yahwistic practice. As May argues, “Ezekiel, by legislating that the east gate of the temple area be permanently closed, would bring to an end the equinoctial ritual of the solar cult.”<sup>22</sup>

The inner east gate does not seem to be physically closed, or if it is, no mention is made of this in the text, but it is also obviously forbidden as a passageway. On weekdays the inner gate remains shut but on Sabbath days and on days of the feast of new moon, the prince is allowed to eat his sacrificial meal in the inner east gate.

### **The Eastern Gates and the *Nasi***

The prince has access to both the outer and the inner east gates. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, here may be the meaning of the inverted vestibules. The prince is to enter both gates through their vestibules, the first main rooms that present themselves to him from the outer court. As illustrated in Figure 14, he enters both gates via the outer court which he previously has entered, as the rest of the laity, through either the outer

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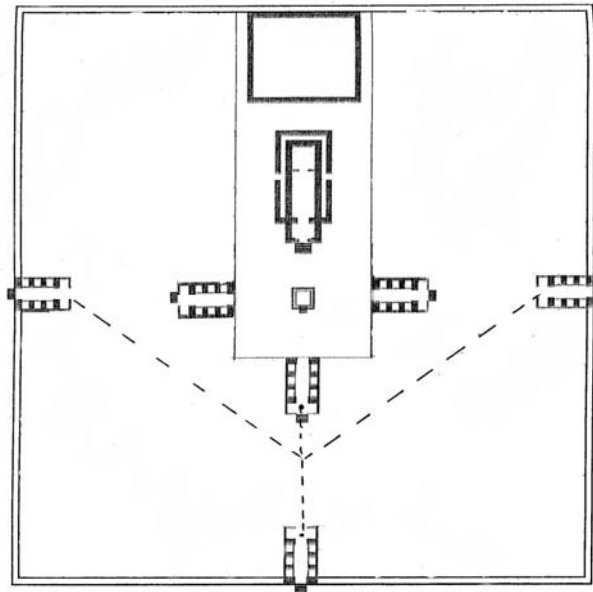
<sup>20</sup> As supported by, among others, May “Solar Worship,” 269-281 and “The departure of the Glory of Yahweh,” 309-321, and Morgenstern, “Gates of Righteousness,” 1-38.

<sup>21</sup> Morgenstern, “Gates of Righteousness,” 32.

<sup>22</sup> May, “Solar Worship,” 281.

north gate or the outer south gate. It has to be emphasized once again that the eastern gates are not a path of entry. The prince enters them through their vestibules, then turns around and leaves the same way. The vestibules seem to be the only part of the east gates he has access to, and the inner court is forbidden ground even for him.

Prior to exiting the same way he entered, the prince stands by the post of the gate, either inner or outer. When he has access to the inner east gate, on the feasts of the new moon, the priests offer his sacrifices, while he prostrates himself on the threshold of the gate. No precision is given as to whether the inner or the outer threshold is here intended. Zimmerli and Block both argue for the outer threshold, the one closest to the inner court. This would mean that the prince has access to the whole length of the gatehouse and that “this vantage point enables him, as guardian and patron of the cult, to observe the cultic activity of the priests.”<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 14: The Prince's Route**

<sup>23</sup> See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:477 and Block, *Ezekiel*, 671.

The status of the prince is debated by scholars. Eichrodt has concluded that “the one person counted worthy of treading on such a holy spot is the reigning prince of Israel.”<sup>24</sup> Levenson concurs and argues that “the nāšî occupies center stage in the temple.”<sup>25</sup> Zimmerli agrees that the prince has special status: “the prince, as the most distinguished member of the lay congregation, is accorded the privilege of eating his meal in the gate structure which has been sanctified by Yahweh’s entry.”<sup>26</sup> Block follows the same line of thought and says that the prince occupies the gateway through which Yahweh had entered the temple “transforming an access vehicle into a place for cultic activities,” and that he is “a cultic figure, one singled out and authorized to eat before Yahweh in the sacred gate.”<sup>27</sup>

Stevenson and Smith articulate an opposite opinion: princely worship at the east gate denotes a demotion of royalty. Stevenson argues that “in relation to the House of YHWH, the Nasi is a power subject whose access to the House is carefully defined.”<sup>28</sup> Because the prince is restricted from the inner court but granted access to the outer east gate and the inner east gate, Stevenson argues that the vision demotes the monarchy: “While Solomon stood at the altar and presided over the dedication of the Jerusalem Temple, the Nasi has no access to the Inner Court and the Altar. The priests offer his sacrifices for him, while he stands at the doorpost of the Inner East Gate.” She believes that this notion is furthered by the location of the prince’s possession, located outside of

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<sup>24</sup> W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) 560.

<sup>25</sup> J.D. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* (Missoula: Scholar Press, 1976) 140.

<sup>26</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:441.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 651.

<sup>28</sup> Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 120.

the area of the “contributed portion” and that “it is clear from this that the Nasi is the one whose access is restricted.”<sup>29</sup>

Smith goes even further in arguing that the cultic area reserved for the prince symbolizes a demotion of royalty. For him, the prince is not portrayed as a king but

at best, he is a mock king as in some saturnalian role reversal... It would appear, at first glance, that the royal figure is being given special status. He has access to the vestibule of the outer, eastern gateway, which is reserved for YHWH alone... No other human being has such access... This is to overlook the orientation of Ezekiel’s temple map. Because the gate is barred, the ‘prince’ does not enter from the auspicious, solar east towards which the temple faces... but from the dark west – the only one of the four cardinal directions not to have a temple gate... The ‘prince’ enters in a manner counter to the royal path of YHWH. This is to suggest that the ‘prince’ is no king.<sup>30</sup>

Evidently, compared to the status of such a king as Solomon, the power of the monarchy is here lessened. The prince, like the rest of Israel, endures restrictions which are imposed upon him by the architectural structure of the temple. The fact that he is barred from access to the inner court is sufficient to illustrate this point. Yet Ezekiel still gives a predominant role to the monarchy. He realizes that Davidic hope is part of a successful return and cannot be abandoned. Prior to chapters 40-48, Ezekiel refers twice to the Davidic monarchy, in terms that are in line with traditional Davidic hope: “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd” (34:24); “My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd” (37:24). Because of the notion of Davidic hope, the prince is given certain privileges and status compared to the rest of the laity. This is illustrated in the preferred closeness to Yahweh which he is able to enjoy during worship

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<sup>29</sup> Both quotes are from Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 122.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *To Take Place*, 62.

as well as in the portion of land that is allocated to him. Yet, he too, because of past sins, is subjected to restrictions that are imposed upon him by the architecture of holy space within the temple complex.

### **Summary of Chapter Five**

The importance of the east gate relies on many elements, all of them associated with different facets of Yahweh, whether the symbolism is used to assimilate and thereby, oddly enough, abolish the confusion between Yahweh and a solar deity or to prove Yahweh's loyalty to his people. The eastern gates also emphasize special privileges granted to the prince in term of access, as well as the restrictions that will keep him from repeating the ignominies which his ancestors committed.

The gates can therefore be restricted pathways from one sphere of holiness to the next (i.e., the laity in the outer court and the priests in the inner court) or even cultic rooms. Yet one aspect of the gates still has not been touched upon: within the temple complex with its strictly delimited zones of increasing holiness, what is their own degree of sanctity? This quite essential question is answered in the description of the north gate to which we now turn.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE INNER NORTH GATE

As I have discussed in the preceding chapters, the gates of Ezekiel's temple complex act as filtering devices. Their purpose is to restrict access to the different areas of the temple that are separated from one another by walls and different levels of elevation, corresponding to their respective degree of holiness. Thus the gates impose upon the people a correct form of worship.

The inner north gate serves the same purpose, but its six verses-long description also introduces a new and odd characteristic: the north gate has a cultic function. These verses, an apparent later accretion by a Priestly author, depict a deceptively incomplete and obscure layout of cultic furnishing. I will demonstrate that the manifest intent behind this addition was neither to supply a list of sacrificial paraphernalia nor to provide the original audience with a cultic choreography, but rather to grant clear sanctification to the gates and the Levites, which have no definitive status on the holiness spectrum.

#### **A Later Hand?**

Ezekiel 40:35-43 which introduces the inner north gate differs from preceding descriptions of other gates in both content and form. For the first time in the temple tour, the furnishing of a gate is extensively described. The emphasis placed on the gate's function as a sacrificial site disrupts the general harmony of the layout and brutally halts the fluidity of the linear ascending progression so far established.

Two of the elements which have characterized the tour and given it a lulling sense of unity are conspicuously absent. Measurements are blatantly omitted except in the case of some

of the sacrificial tables, and even then, they are given without any reference to the usual activity of Ezekiel's heavenly guide.

The incongruity of these verses is widely recognized. Even Block, who does not assign this section to the work of a later hand but unconvincingly attributes it to a style exercise in realism, acknowledges the sudden change of content and emphasis.<sup>1</sup> Zimmerli argues that the combination of the aforementioned peculiarities sets this section off from the rest of the text, and he attributes verses 38-43 to the work of a later hand, which could no longer reproduce the style of Ezekiel.<sup>2</sup> Wevers notes that the specific interest of this later hand in the performance of the cult conflicts with the rest of the temple tour since the "emphasis on the use to which parts of the complex were intended is alien to the nature of the original narrative which simply details the measurements."<sup>3</sup>

This later hand, presumably Priestly and probably responsible for all later accretions mentioning Zadokite and Levite rights and duties, superimposed its own concerns and interests on the architectural symbolism of Ezekiel's temple.

### **An Inner Gate Just Like Any Others**

The inner north gate is one of the three that provide access from the outer court to the inner court and it is designed as a reverse image of the outer east gate prototype. It lies within the outer court and is reached by eight steps, for which no measurements are provided. Within its

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<sup>1</sup> Block compares this passage to a museum in which a tour-guide leading art aficionados pauses along the way to describe a specific feature at greater length, withdrawing into the background to let the said-feature take central stage. Block, *Ezekiel*, 531.

<sup>2</sup>Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 2:365) believes this later hand also produced the description of the chambers on the north and south of this gate (v. 44 – 47), the reasoning for these chambers (v. 42:13 f) and the description of the altar (v. 41:22F.) and he notes (pp.343-344) that in the description of the five other gates are missing all details "about the interior furnishing as well as the details concerning the purpose for which the buildings are to be used. With almost ascetic severity, the text concentrates on the exact description of a ground plan."

<sup>3</sup> Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 296-97.



twenty-five cubits width and its fifty cubits length, four rooms line up on a “shot gun” axis: the vestibule, the inner threshold, the corridor lined with its side rooms, and the first threshold which grants access to the inner court.

### **An Architectural Difference: the Chamber**

Similarities with other gates stop at the architectural description given in verses 35-38. Ezekiel 40:38 introduces a major architectural difference: the addition of a chamber, the door of which opens into the vestibule. This chamber is reserved for the washing of the entrails and lower legs of the sacrificial victims prior to the burnt offering.

This chamber sets up a sudden side-ways deviation from the outer-gate/ inner-gate/ temple-building route of the temple tour. Its existence, as well as its purpose, are mentioned but neither its measurements, nor its shape, nor its exact location are indicated. All that can be assumed from the text is that it is located on either the west wall or the east wall of the vestibule and that it either runs the whole length of the gate or occupies only a fraction of it. The width of the north gate is increased, therefore, from twenty-five cubits to twenty-five cubits plus the width of the chamber. This refutes the introductory statement made in verse 35 that the inner north gate “had the same dimensions as the others.”

The unexpected description of furniture and various types of sacrifices accentuates the dissymmetrical yet orientationally normative cultic nature of the gate. Indeed, Priestly theology has always promoted the northern side of the altar as the appropriate site for sacrifices, and this orientation has been reproduced in subsequent Jewish shrines.<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 1:11 locates the killing

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<sup>4</sup> See Haran, *Temples and Temple-Services*, 45-46. He notes, without making a distinction between the Ezekielian text and a possible later addition, that the Priestly school’s influence shows in this positioning of the north gate as a sacrificial one.

of animals for the burnt offering on the north side of the altar of the tabernacle, and such was the practice in the slaughter of sacred offerings in both the Solomonic and the Herodian temples.

### **A Nebulous Description of Sacrificial Tables**

The gate is furnished with sacrificial tables; however, the text is rather confusing as to the number of tables and their exact location. Verse 39 introduces four inside tables, two on either side of the vestibule. They are to be used for the slaughter of the burnt offering, the purification offering, and the reparation offering. Verse 40 mentions two sets of two tables on either side (*kātep*) of the gate. The word *kātep* can either refer to the sides of the façade (in which case the table would be flanking the entrance of the gate) or to the actual side of the building.<sup>5</sup> Verse 41 alludes to four tables outside and four inside. It is not clear whether these are the eight aforementioned tables or eight new ones. Finally, verse 42 introduces the material used for four tables reserved for the burnt offering, without clarifying if a new set of tables reserved solely for this type of offering is here revealed or if these tables are four of the eight (sixteen?) already mentioned, in which case the term “burnt offering” would be used as a generic term referring collectively to the three different types of sacrifice. The general consensus is that, altogether, there are eight tables: four on the outside of the gate and four inside the vestibule.<sup>6</sup>

The four tables for the burnt offering are made of hewn stone and are one and half cubit long, one and a half cubit wide, and one cubit high.<sup>7</sup> The text does not indicate whether these

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<sup>5</sup> This interpretation seems to be favored by Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:366 and Block, *Ezekiel*, 533.

<sup>6</sup> See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:366, Block, *Ezekiel*, 533, and Wevers (*Ezekiel*, 303) who actually argues for twelve tables.

<sup>7</sup> The Septuagint describes the tables as being two and a half cubits wide.

tables are outside or inside the gate, nor if these measurements are to be applied to the remaining tables.<sup>8</sup>

Let us assumed, for the sake of harmony so dear to the author of the Vorlage, that the outside tables are located on either side of the façade of the gate, aligned with the inside tables. The text still does not provide enough detailed information as to their exact location, whether on the last step of the stairs, or at the bottom of the stairs, in the outer court. Stair measurements are never indicated in the Ezekielian temple, and there, therefore, are no indications that the steps would be wide enough to accommodate the tables. Yet, since there is no indication of height discrepancy between the gate and the location of the outside tables, one could be tempted to conclude that they are on top of the stairs by the gate's entrance and not in the court.

Clearly, the lengthy section about the tables is puzzling. This description appears at best to be vague, and rather useless if it is to be taken as an accurate furnishing blueprint for the gate. Yet it cannot be assumed that this extensive, although somewhat hazy, portrayal is trivial or due to the megalomaniac tendencies of a later Priestly hand indulging in the luxury of imposing at all cost its agenda on Ezekiel's blueprint. The significance of these five verses actually lies behind the first-degree physical description of the tables. It is to be found either in a possible cuing of cultic choreography or in the wider issue around which revolves the whole temple tour: that of sacred space.

### **Cuing of Cultic Choreography?**

In the case of ritual performance, motions from one area to another can supply indications as to the ritual practice as well as to its purpose and social meaning. In the north gate, furnishings

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<sup>8</sup> Block (*Ezekiel*, 533) argues for the outside tables, and believes the inside ones are for washing (which would illogically make the washing room useless). Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 2:367) argues that they are the inside tables.

could be seen as a map delineating motions, each set of tables prompting a new set of actions. As

B. Levine argues,

Temples and other cult installation were built with established cult rites in mind or with the purpose of instituting new or revised rites. The result was that the architectural plan of ancient temples and the placement of installed artifacts within their sacred space expressed or reflected intended functions. Conversely, the choreography of cultic celebrations was itself conditioned by certain notions of space and location deriving from customary building methods and designs.<sup>9</sup>

The descriptions of Priestly rituals do not include any references to social context. The Biblical text usually does not dwell in nuances of choreography, probably because the original audience was already familiar with the required motions and meanings of the rituals, and a detailed depiction of each step would have been superfluous.<sup>10</sup> The accretion in Ezekiel could have the value of a choreographic blueprint for the original audience if and only if it is ritualistically sound and introduces new cultic elements unfamiliar to the audience which would then validate the justification of this insertion.

Not only does this passage not provide such introduction of new elements or rules, it is so full of cultic aberrations that it cannot be interpreted as a codification of choreography through the arrangement of cultic furnishing.

The location of the outside tables by the north gate, whether on top of the stairs or in the outer court, would cause a massive gathering of worshipers in this area. This congregation

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<sup>9</sup>B. Levine, "Ritual as Symbol: Modes of Sacrifice in Israelite Religion" in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 125.

<sup>10</sup> F.H. Gorman points out that the movements of the high priests in Lev. 16 are noted but not characterized with precision. See F.H. Gorman, Jr., *The Ideology of Ritual, Space and Status in the Priestly Theology*, JSOT supp. 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 36. As Levine ("Ritual as Symbol," 125) writes, "It would be of great value, therefore, were we able to choreograph the celebration of the biblical sacrificial rites so as to link function and form." Unfortunately this has not been successfully achieved yet.

around the north gate would ruin the simple and brilliant efficacy of the mass control device of rotating northern-entrance /southern-exit described in Ezekiel 46:9-10.

Presuming that the outside tables are accessible to worshipers, they would be allowed to watch the performance of some of the sacrificial preparation, but in any case, they would not be able to actively participate in those carried out inside the gate. Due to the lack of physical involvement in the ritual, an essential step of sacrifice, that of the laying on of the hand, would have to be eliminated. This gesture does not suggest a transfer of sin from the worshiper to the animal, which then dies in his place as a substitute.<sup>11</sup> Rather, as is suggested by Wright, this gesture points to the ritualistic attribution of a sacrificed animal to the one performing the gesture.<sup>12</sup> The resting of the hand on the victim just implies the readiness of the offerer to surrender what belongs to him.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore conceivable that this readiness of the worshiper to identify the offering as his could be taken for granted once the priest receives the victim to be slaughtered from his hands. The laity would then have no real need to physically access the tables. Yet, this ritual was kept in subsequent Jewish temples, not because of the substitutionary value of the victim, but because if man were to omit the prescribed form of the ritual, “he would irrevocably fall under the just and annihilating wrath of God.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The only case of sin transfer could be Lev. 16:21 in which Aaron places two hands on the head of the scapegoat dedicated to Azazel. But this scapegoat is not to be sacrificed; instead it is let loose in the wilderness since if the animal was to be offered to Yahweh, it might desecrate the altar. See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1041. Also see Wright, “The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature” *JAOS* 106 436. G.J. Wenham argues for a link of identity from the worshiper to the victim based on the exact meaning of the verb *sāmak* (to press, to lean on). G.J. Wenham, “The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice” in *Sacrifice in the Bible* (Grand Rapid: Baker Book House, 1995), 79. Wright (“Hands, lay on of” *ABD* 3:47) dismisses *sāmak* as nothing more than an idiomatic expression with a negligible connotation of pressure.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, “Hands, lay on of,” 47-48. See also Wright, “Laying of the hand,” 439, in which he claims that in Hittite ceremonies, the worshiper places his hand on or at a distance from his offering, which ritually attributes it to him. Though in Hittite rites, this motion is usually performed over food or already slaughtered animals.

<sup>13</sup> In the case of small animal offerings, such as birds, no mention of the laying of the hand is mentioned, certainly because by holding the fowl, the worshiper is already claiming it as its property. Milgrom (*Leviticus*, 152) argues that hand-leaning was a requisite in the case of large animals, since they were dragged in by rope and ownership had to be established lest the sacrifice be invalid.

<sup>14</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 165.

As for the three types of sacrifice mentioned, the burnt offering, the purification offering, and the reparation offering, they are both common and frequently mentioned in the biblical text. In addition, the utter lack of any reference to a draining system designed to evacuate the blood of the slaughter is incompatible with the obsession of Priestly theology with the disposal of blood.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, these verses are neither a cultic interior decorator's blueprint, since they lack all the precisions required for the viability of the layout, nor are they pointing to a new ritualistic choreography since they do not provide the original audience with a plausible sacrificial innovation with which the laity would have to be acquainted.

### **Two Symbolisms, One Agenda: Graded Holiness**

The introduction of cultic material then finds its meaning and purpose in the notion of sacred space and graded holiness, around which already revolves the whole blueprint of the temple complex. The seemingly odd insertion of the passage describing the north gate reflects the superimposition of a new metaphor on the pre-existing symbolism of Ezekiel. The compositions of the two authors do not necessarily reflect agendas at odds. Both writers share an interest in order and boundaries to strike a balance between purity and impurity.

The author of the Vorlage, is interested in architectural symbolism, relying mainly on symmetry, while the later hand uses cultic elements to stress the upholding of Yahweh's created order. The side-chamber is neither measured nor described because it does not have to be, but it has to be alluded to since it plays a role in purifying the victims prior to the offering on the altar and thus emphasizes the distinction between holy and profane.

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<sup>15</sup> The Septuagint does account for it and translates v. 40:38 as "Its chambers and its doorways and its porches at the second gate served as a drain."

## **Classification of the Gates on the Holiness Spectrum**

Why would this later hand feel the need to introduce this redundant material here since Ezekiel 44:4-31 already presents a model for the cult? This addition is not accidental, for it actually singles out the problem of the gradation of holiness in the gates themselves.

The gates filter and restrict the exchange of purity and impurity that takes place within the complex, but their own exact location within the spectrum of holiness is unspecified. Since they lie between the inner and the outer court, they do not fit within the concentric model of increasing holiness. They can either share in the level of purity of the outer court or of the inner court or be a form of neutral ground. What is certain is that on one side of a gate holiness is lesser than on the other.

The description of the cult at this precise part of the text is intended as a correction to the *fuzziness* of the position of the gate on the holiness spectrum. The cult acts as a device that defines an area of Ezekiel's Vorlage that was not delimited with enough precision. This revolves again around the recurring obsession that the holy and the profane cannot mix.

## **Space Sanctification and the Status of the Levites**

As is mentioned in chapter two, rituals are one means by which communities continue the order of the world as they perceive it, either through preventive rituals, or rituals of maintenance, or when a breach in the established social order requires a specific type of rites.<sup>16</sup> As Gorman explains,

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<sup>16</sup> Gorman (*The Ideology of Ritual*, 55) argues that "the dominant types of rituals found in the Priestly ritual system are rituals of restoration. These rituals are designed to restore the order of creation when it has been broken, ruptured or damaged."

Rituals are thus means of holding back social confusion, indeterminacy, and chaos because they provide patterns of enacting an ordered existence. In this way, rituals regulate societal order by giving normative patterns for maintaining order and constructive patterns for restoring that order when it has been lost.<sup>17</sup>

This need to maintain order is illustrated through the three types of sacrifices that occur in the north gate. Most of the sacrificial law in the Pentateuch comes from the Priestly code which did not reach its present form until the post-exilic age. Yet there is no reason to believe that most of the laws described in the present form of the text were not already present prior to the exile. These three types of sacrifices are all purificatory rites. Curiously, such type of offering as the peace offering and the thank offering are not mentioned. It seems that the author has here chosen to bring up only the type of sacrifices that have a function of their own in the filtering of impurity.

The first type of sacrifice, the burnt offering or holocaust, involves a total consumption of the animal by fire. No portion of the victim is ever eaten. Its original purpose might have been to please Yahweh with an expensive gift, but it seems later to refer to any sacrifice that was burnt whole and to have also acquired the function of turning away divine wrath. The priests had the duty of disposing of the blood by throwing it against the altar, washing the legs and the entrails, and laying the fat and the flesh on the altar.

The second type of sacrifice is the purification offering. The Hebrew term *hattāt*, derived from a form of the verb to sin, denotes the concept of *de-sinning* or cleansing. This sacrifice was offered in case an individual, or the community, was stained because of a major impurity involuntarily contracted. The blood was smeared on the horns of the altar and poured at the base of it. In the case of individual offering, the priests would eat the flesh. In the case of communal offering, the whole flesh was taken outside of the sanctuary and burnt.

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<sup>17</sup>Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 29.



The third type of sacrifice is the reparation or guilt offering. The blood was thrown against the altar instead of being poured at the base. The fatty portion was burnt and the flesh eaten by the priests. Since this sacrifice was offered in order to atone for an offense against a third party, it could be substituted by a monetary reparation plus one fifth of the amount that had to be paid to the lessened party. If the offended party was Yahweh, as would be the case when a defiled Nazirite renewed his vows, the financial reparation was replaced by a sacrificial one.

Through this depiction of purificatory sacrifices, the intent of the writer is not to allude to a sanctification of people, but rather to a sanctification of space. As Milgrom notes in the case of purification offering, the offender needs forgiveness because his inadvertence had contaminated the sanctuary and it is the sanctuary itself that is in need of decontamination. Thus, “by daubing the altar with the (הטאת) blood or by bringing it inside the sanctuary, the priest purges the most sacred objects and areas of the sanctuary on behalf of the person who caused their contamination by his physical impurity or inadvertent offense.”<sup>18</sup>

Sacred space must be protected and cleansed when necessary in order to maintain Yahweh’s presence in the holy of holies, since “humans can drive god out of the sanctuary by polluting it with their moral and ritual sins. All that the priests can do is periodically purge the sanctuary of its impurities.”<sup>19</sup>

Because there is no way to know where exactly the more profane condition of the outer court stops within the realm of the inner gates, the purging symbolically grants a defined degree of holiness to a space that formerly possessed none. The north gate represents all the gates.

Attributing a holiness status to the gates is crucial since they are the realm of the Levites, who so far do not have a specific status on the holiness spectrum. Just as the laity and the prince,

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<sup>18</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 256

<sup>19</sup> Milgrom, “Priestly (‘P’) Source” *ABD* 5:455.

they have in the past rendered themselves guilty of abominations. In Ezekiel 44:10-12, the Levites are accused of having ministered to idols and having become “a stumbling block of iniquity to the House of Israel.”<sup>20</sup>

The passage about the inner north gate defines the status of the Levites which is based on access. The Levites are described in Ezekiel as a second class clergy. They are holier than the laity, since they can go further than the outer gate, but not as holy as the priests since they are banned from the inner court. Their domain of action is the gates which they guard.

Their station at the gates also insures a correct cultic behavior on their part. Because they are banned from the inner court, they will not be able to desecrate the holiest part of the sanctuary as they have done in the past.

### **Summary of Chapter Six**

The apparent incongruity of the emphasis that is placed on the cultic role of the north gate only puzzles if one supposes the furnishings are to fit within the gate as in a doll house. The Priestly writer responsible for the accretion of verses 38-43 and Ezekiel share the same agenda. Both of them expound the message that everything in the created world belongs to different categories of holiness. These categories have to be kept separated and regulated lest purity and impurity corrupt one another and lead to the withdrawal of Yahweh. Both authors provide a blueprint for the safekeeping of holiness from possible defilement by impurity and both blueprints derive from characteristic Priestly theology. In the Vorlage, order is established through a careful observation of sacred space and separation between holy and profane areas.

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<sup>20</sup> The scope of diverging scholarly opinions on the polemic on the demotion of the Levites can be grasped through A. Cody, *A History of the Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 166-168 and R. Duke, “Punishment or Restoration? Another Look at the Levites of Ezekiel 44.6-16,” *JSOT* 40(1998) 61-81.

The insertion offers a cultic corrective to what is perceived as a lack of precision in holiness gradation in the original blueprint and stresses how worship helps delimit, create, and most of all protect sacred space.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS

The Book of Ezekiel reflects the angst of the exiled community and the estrangement from God which the Judahites endured in Babylon. The text attributes the departure of Yahweh and the succeeding exile to the moral and cultic failures of the community.

However, Ezekiel also provides the exiles with a message of hope and a blueprint for restoration. Both this message and the blueprint are encoded in the last chapters of the book describing the temple vision.

The architecture of the temple stresses the separation between the holy and the profane, delimited by a succession of concentric circles, each endowed with an increasing level of holiness. The gates enable passage from one gradation to the next and are therefore a crucial feature of the temple complex. They restrict access and therefore avoid the dangerous contagion of impurities. By their very presence and structure, they impose a number of regulations on the correct way to worship and give a definite and restricted status to the laity, the prince and the Levites, all previously guilty of the abominations that caused the exile. These restrictions, artificially imposed, are a guarantee that abominations will not be repeated and defile the holy, driving Yahweh away again.

Yahweh will only come back once the community, just like the temple, is ready for him, i.e., once the difference between the profane and the holy is respected and once correct worship is restored.

Israel needs a framework that can guarantee that the people cannot err again. This framework is illustrated in the temple vision as it was previously illustrated in the metaphor of the “new heart” introduced in Ezekiel 11:19 and 36: 26. As B. Vawter and L. Hoppe argue, the Judahites will be given a new heart: “the people must be remade so that disobedience becomes impossibility for them.”<sup>1</sup> The same metaphor is encoded in the architecture of the temple. This in itself is a guarantee that Yahweh will never leave again.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Vawter and L. Hoppe, *A New Heart: A commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, (Edinburgh: Eerdman, 1991) 164.

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