EZEKIEL

Chapter 40

*The New Temple Area*

**In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city—on that very day the hand of the LORD was upon me and he took me there.  2 In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city.  3 He took me there, and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze; he was standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand.  4 The man said to me, “Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears and pay attention to everything I am going to show you, for that is why you have been brought here. Tell the house of Israel everything you see.”**

**40:1** *twenty-fifth year … beginning … tenth.* Apr. 28, 573 b.c. (CSB)

An unusually complex date notice opens Ezekiel’s temple vision. The entire vision (chapters 40–48) was revealed on this date. The notice contains three points of reference. The first and third relate to the deportation to Babylon in 597 (see figure 1, “The Dates in Ezekiel”). (CC)

By “*our* captivity,” Ezekiel expresses his solidarity with his audience. We cannot be certain, but there is considerable agreement among commentators that “the twenty-fifth year” is more than a simple chronological notice. Since Jeremiah had predicted that the exile would last seventy years (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10), and historically we calculate that it lasted from 605–538 b.c., “the twenty-fifth year” here (573 b.c.) should not be pressed to imply the exact midpoint of the exile, although it is close. Nevertheless, it may suggest a turning point when the exiles could look forward with greater expectation to the return to their homeland. (CC)

Every fiftieth year was to be a Jubilee, when land lost through foreclosure was to be returned and all Israelite slaves released. This year in which Ezekiel is writing may have been a Jubilee Year, or perhaps the midpoint between Jubilee Years. But even if it was neither, the “twenty-fifth year” likely would have symbolic significance as half the Jubilee number. Lev 25:10 states that on the Jubilee, the Israelites are to proclaim רְּרוֹר, “liberty,” which Ezekiel uses in 46:17 in his reference to the Jubilee as “the year of liberation.” In Is 61:1 the Suffering Servant uses רְּרוֹר more generally: “Yahweh has anointed me … to proclaim liberty to the captives.” Jesus quotes that passage in his inaugural sermon in Nazareth (Lk 4:18) to summarize the Gospel proclamation that will characterize his ministry, and it also characterizes the continuing proclamation of the church throughout the NT era, until he returns in glory. (CC)

The liberty associated with the Jubilee, and the connotation of “twenty-five” as half of the way to it, might also explain why twenty-five and multiples of it appear so often in the rest of the book. Thus when the dimensions of the temple and its compound so frequently involve twenty-five (40:13, 21, 25, 29, 30, 33, 36) and its multiples (e.g., 40:15, 19; 42:16–20), and the sacred reserve of land is twenty-five thousand units (cubits?) long (45:1–6; see also 48:8–21), one should sense an evangelical significance. (CC)

The second point of reference given in 40:1 is “at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month.” Considerable debate has swirled around these phrases. רֹאשׁ הַשָּׂנָה (*roʾ’h ha’hanah*), “the head of the year,” in later Hebrew (as in modern Hebrew) means “New Year’s Day.” A generation ago there was much speculation that ancient Israel celebrated such a festival, but that critical fad has now been almost totally abandoned since the rest of the OT betrays not even a hint of its presence. This is the only appearance of the phrase in the OT, and here, where the *tenth* day is specified, it must mean “the *beginning* of the year.” Modern Israel does observe a Rosh Hashanah on the first day of Tishri (the *seventh* month of the liturgical calendar), but the *tenth* day of that month is the climax of the liturgical calendar: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Even if a calendar whose year began in the autumn had already been accepted in everyday life in the OT era, there is no indication that the liturgy had ever abandoned its ancient method of beginning the year in the spring (Nisan), and of all people, we would scarcely expect Ezekiel, a priest (1:3), to do so. That he did not is confirmed by the liturgical rituals he prescribes in 45:18–25, which also presuppose a spring New Year. (CC)

Why, then, does Ezekiel specify the *tenth* day of the month? The tenth of Nisan was the day the Passover lambs were selected (Ex 12:3), and that festival’s connection with the general theme of salvation (cf. above on the Jubilee) would seem appropriate here. But Ezekiel mentions the Passover only once (45:21), and he mentions the Day of Atonement in the fall not at all. Block suggests that Ezekiel’s intent here is polemical: to counter the *akītu* festival, the great Babylonian New Year festival celebrating Marduk’s supremacy. That would have great plausibility if Ezekiel were thinking of an autumnal New Year celebration, but the unlikelihood of that has already been noted. So perhaps we do best to seek no particular significance in “tenth”; the vision simply happened to come on that day. The tenth day of the first month of the twenty-fifth year of Ezekiel’s exile was around April 28, 573. (CC)

The third point of reference in Ezekiel’s date notice, “in the fourteenth year after the city had fallen” (40:1), agrees with the first point of reference and so adds no additional information. “Fallen” translates a (Hophal perfect) form of נָכָה, “smite, destroy,” the same form used in 33:21, and the verb’s Hiphil imperative (הַכּוּ), “smite, strike, slaughter” had been used in 9:5 when Yahweh commanded the execution of all whose foreheads had not been marked with the *taw* (see 9:4). The motif of the reversal of the temple’s destruction will be especially evident in 43:1–12, where God’s Glory returns to the city it abandoned in 11:22–23. (CC)

The addition of “on that very day” (40:1) suggests, humanly speaking, Ezekiel’s recollection of the anniversary of his own deportation “at the turn of the year” (2 Chr 36:10) and all the subsequent tragedies. (CC)

The anthropomorphic reference to “the hand of Yahweh” catapults us back to the inaugural vision (1:3; cf. 37:1). In 8:1–3 the “hand” had been rather violent in transporting the prophet in a vision to pre-fall Jerusalem. (CC)

 *of our exile.* All the dates in the book of Ezekiel (see chart on “Dates in Ezekiel”) are reckoned from the 597 exile, but only here and in 33:21 is the exile specifically mentioned (see 1:2). (CSB)

 *the beginning of the year.* Hebrew *Rosh Hashanah,* the well-known Jewish New Year festival. It has long occurred in the fall (in either September or October), but since throughout the book Ezekiel uses a different and older religious calendar, the spring date as given above is correct (see note on Lev 23:24). (CSB)

 *hand of the Lord was upon me.* See note on 1:3. (CSB)

**40:2** *visions of God.*† See Outline (III. I.) in Introduction. Introduces all three of Ezekiel’s major visions (see 1:1; 8:3). (CSB)

The “hand” (40:1) brings Ezekiel to “the land [אֶרֶץ] of Israel” (40:2), which appears elsewhere in the book only in the trade list of 27:17 and later in 47:18. Ezekiel’s usual phrase is, literally, “the ground [אֲדָמָה] of Israel” (e.g., 7:2; 11:17; 37:12; 38:18–19), though English versions usually translate both the same way. The reason for the different Hebrew terms is uncertain, but אֶרֶץ, “land,” does have more territorial overtones. Because of the people’s sin, they forfeited “the land of Israel” during the exile, but chapters 40–48 focus on an eschatological restoration, so it is fitting that the phrase appears in 40:2 and 47:18. (CC)

 *very high mountain.* Mount Zion, also seen as extraordinarily high in other prophetic visions (17:22; Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1; Zec 14:10). Height here signifies importance, as the earthly seat of God’s reign. (CSB)

A bit more specificity follows in the description of the locale as “a very high mountain” (40:2). The reference recalls descriptions of Sinai (e.g., Ex 19:11) or Zion (e.g., Is 4:5) as a mountain, but the picture is applied metaphorically and eschatologically to a place suitable for receiving a transcendent vision. Thus the mount of transfiguration, where Christ revealed his divinity, was “a high mountain” (ὄρος ὑψηλόν, Mt 17:1 || Mk 9:2; cf. Lk 9:28), and it was upon “a great and high mountain” that the apostle John was shown the eschatological new Jerusalem (ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, Rev 21:10). Ezekiel had already used the metaphor in 17:22–24. Its classical OT expression appears in Is 2:2–4 || Micah 4:1–3. (CC)

 *on whose south side.* With the city located on its southern slopes, the mountain is to the north (cf. Ps 48; see Ps 48:2 and note). (CSB)

That Yahweh does not name either the mountain or the city undoubtedly reflects the abuse of Jerusalem and its temple mount before the destruction in 586 b.c. and the exile. In Ezekiel God seems averse to the very name “Jerusalem” (which isn’t used at all in chapters 40–48) and ends the book by giving the city a different name (48:35). The temple itself had “buildings resembling a city” (40:2), and the city does not enter the vision until briefly in 45:6–7 and then in chapter 48 when the entire new land distribution is discussed. (CC)

**40:3** The appearance “like bronze” of “the man” recalls the creatures that supported the throne in 1:7 and identifies him as a supernatural being. A longstanding Christian view held by some Lutherans is that this is an appearance of the preincarnate Christ, the architect (cf. Heb 3:3) of his church, the new temple (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16). Keil explains: “This figure suggests a heavenly being, an angel, and as he is called Jehovah in ch. xliv. 2, 5 [44:2, 5], the angel of Jehovah.” Compare Rev 21:9, 15–16, where an angel with a measuring rod measures the new Jerusalem, and Jesus calls him “my angel” (Rev 22:16). In a number of OT passages there is a certain ambiguity as to whether an angel is simply an angel, that is, a created spirit being, or whether it is *the* Angel of the Lord, a preincarnate appearance of God the Son, the Word not yet become flesh, Jesus Christ. A corresponding ambiguity is present in some NT passages too. (CC)

The “man” will address Ezekiel as “son of man” (40:4; 47:6), which is the same address for the prophet that Yahweh himself regularly uses throughout the book. This same “man” (אִ֕ישׁ, 43:6) is present beside Ezekiel when he hears Yahweh speaking to him, and so it seems that the Word of Yahweh comes to Ezekiel through this “man” (see further on 43:6). In fact, throughout most of chapters 40–48 Yahweh apparently speaks to and guides Ezekiel through the agency of this man, probably even in those passages (e.g., chapters 44–45) that do not explicitly refer to this guide. (CC)

This man’s two functions are introduced in 40:3. First, he will measure the temple area, and second, he will guide Ezekiel around and through it. The two devices he carries are a cord made of twisted flax fibers used to measure long distances and, literally, “a reed of measurement,” that is, a rod (a longer version of our yardstick or meter stick) for shorter distances. Its exact length is given in 40:5. His standing “at the gateway” (40:3) indicates the place where in 40:6 the measurements will begin. It is not specified, but since Ezekiel had come from the north (40:2), it is probably the north gate of the outer wall that is meant. From there, in 40:6 the man leads Ezekiel to the east gate. (CC)

 *like bronze.* Indicates the man was other than human. (CSB)

 *in the gateway.* Presumably of the outer court (see vv. 17–19). (CSB)

 *linen cord.* Used for longer measurements such as those in 47:3. (CSB)

 *measuring rod.* Used for shorter measurements—about ten feet and four inches long. (CSB)

**40:4** This admonition indicates that Ezekiel is to preach all the details of the vision to Israel. A similar but fuller admonition to “describe,” “teach them,” and “write” the vision will follow in 43:10–11 after the Glory takes up residence in the new temple (43:1–9). Ezekiel is to be no mere tourist or spectator. Rather his reporting (and presumably explaining) to the Israelites everything he sees is presented as integral to his prophetic vocation. If only we had a transcript of his commentary! (CC)

The apostle John repeatedly received similar admonitions to “write” the contents of the vision he saw, which strengthens the view that Ezekiel 40–48 is to be interpreted in light of Revelation. (CC)

*The East Gate to the Outer Court*

**5 I saw a wall completely surrounding the temple area. The length of the measuring rod in the man’s hand was six long cubits, each of which was a cubit and a handbreadth. He measured the wall; it was one measuring rod thick and one rod high. 6 Then he went to the gate facing east. He climbed its steps and measured the threshold of the gate; it was one rod deep.  7 The alcoves for the guards were one rod long and one rod wide, and the projecting walls between the alcoves were five cubits thick. And the threshold of the gate next to the portico facing the temple was one rod deep. 8 Then he measured the portico of the gateway;  9 it was eight cubits deep and its jambs were two cubits thick. The portico of the gateway faced the temple. 10 Inside the east gate were three alcoves on each side; the three had the same measurements, and the faces of the projecting walls on each side had the same measurements.  11 Then he measured the width of the entrance to the gateway; it was ten cubits and its length was thirteen cubits.  12 In front of each alcove was a wall one cubit high, and the alcoves were six cubits square.  13 Then he measured the gateway from the top of the rear wall of one alcove to the top of the opposite one; the distance was twenty-five cubits from one parapet opening to the opposite one.  14 He measured along the faces of the projecting walls all around the inside of the gateway—sixty cubits. The measurement was up to the portico facing the courtyard.  15 The distance from the entrance of the gateway to the far end of its portico was fifty cubits.  16 The alcoves and the projecting walls inside the gateway were surmounted by narrow parapet openings all around, as was the portico; the openings all around faced inward. The faces of the projecting walls were decorated with palm trees.**

**40:5** *wall completely surrounding the temple area.* Separating the sacred from the secular. (CSB)

 *six long cubits.* In using the long cubit (seven handbreadths, or about 21 inches), which was older than the shorter cubit (six handbreadths, or about 18 inches), Ezekiel was returning to more ancient standards for the new community (see 2Ch 3:3). (CSB)

Ezekiel is first shown the exterior features of the temple compound. Although the “man” is standing at one of the gateways (40:3), he first calls the prophet’s attention to the outer wall. If the prophet is approaching the temple compound from the outside, the massive walls would naturally be the first feature to catch his attention. From a literary standpoint, mention of the wall both here and at the conclusion of the temple vision in 42:20 forms an inclusio. (CC)

Unusual is the report of the wall’s height. Usually Ezekiel gives us only horizontal ground plans and pays no attention to vertical dimensions. But the purpose may be to accent the wall’s purpose, that is, to separate the sacred and the profane (42:20) and keep the interior “most holy” (43:12). If our calculations of the length of the “long cubit” are correct (see the third textual note on 40:5), the wall, whose height and thickness were both six cubits, was over ten feet high and ten feet thick. (CC)

The length of the wall was five hundred cubits on each side. We are not informed of what materials it was constructed, nor are we told the material of most of the other components of the compound. (CC)

**40:6** *gate facing east.* The gate of the outer court. The three gates (east, north, south) of the outer court were similar to the three in the inner court (v. 32), having six alcoves for the guards (three on each side) and a portico (vv. 8–9). Comparable gate plans have been discovered at Megiddo, Gezer and Hazor, all dating from the time of Solomon (see 1Ki 9:15). The guards kept out anyone who might profane the temple area (see Ezr 2:62). (CSB)

 *climbed its steps.* The first of three sets of stairs leading to the temple. This one had seven steps (v. 22); the next one (inner court), eight (v. 31); the last (temple), ten (v. 49; see NIV text note)— possibly indicating increasing degrees of “holiness” (sacredness). (CSB)

**40:9** *portico of the gateway faced the temple.* The reverse position of the porticoes of the inner court gates, which faced away from the temple (v. 34). (CSB)

**40:10** *three alcoves.* The alcoves for the guards, mentioned in v. 7. (CSB)

**40:16** *palm trees.* As in Solomon’s temple (see 1Ki 6:29, 32, 35). (CSB)

*The Outer Court*

**17 Then he brought me into the outer court. There I saw some rooms and a pavement that had been constructed all around the court; there were thirty rooms along the pavement.  18 It abutted the sides of the gateways and was as wide as they were long; this was the lower pavement.  19 Then he measured the distance from the inside of the lower gateway to the outside of the inner court; it was a hundred cubits on the east side as well as on the north.**

**40:17** *thirty rooms.* The exact location of these rooms is not given. They were probably intended for the people’s use (see Jer 35:2, 4). (CSB)

**40:19** *hundred cubits.* Over 170 feet separated the outer wall from the inner wall and was the width of the outer court. (CSB)

*The North Gate*

**20 Then he measured the length and width of the gate facing north, leading into the outer court.  21 Its alcoves—three on each side—its projecting walls and its portico had the same measurements as those of the first gateway. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide.  22 Its openings, its portico and its palm tree decorations had the same measurements as those of the gate facing east. Seven steps led up to it, with its portico opposite them.  23 There was a gate to the inner court facing the north gate, just as there was on the east. He measured from one gate to the opposite one; it was a hundred cubits.**

**40:20** *gate facing north.* Both it and the south gate (v. 24) were identical to the east gate. (CSB)

**40:22** *Seven steps.* See note on v. 6.1(CSB)

*The South Gate*

**24 Then he led me to the south side and I saw a gate facing south. He measured its jambs and its portico, and they had the same measurements as the others.  25 The gateway and its portico had narrow openings all around, like the openings of the others. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide.  26 Seven steps led up to it, with its portico opposite them; it had palm tree decorations on the faces of the projecting walls on each side.  27 The inner court also had a gate facing south, and he measured from this gate to the outer gate on the south side; it was a hundred cubits.**

*Gates to the Inner Court*

**28 Then he brought me into the inner court through the south gate, and he measured the south gate; it had the same measurements as the others.  29 Its alcoves, its projecting walls and its portico had the same measurements as the others. The gateway and its portico had openings all around. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide.  30 (The porticoes of the gateways around the inner court were twenty-five cubits wide and five cubits deep.)  31 Its portico faced the outer court; palm trees decorated its jambs, and eight steps led up to it. 32 Then he brought me to the inner court on the east side, and he measured the gateway; it had the same measurements as the others.  33 Its alcoves, its projecting walls and its portico had the same measurements as the others. The gateway and its portico had openings all around. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide.  34 Its portico faced the outer court; palm trees decorated the jambs on either side, and eight steps led up to it. 35 Then he brought me to the north gate and measured it. It had the same measurements as the others,  36 as did its alcoves, its projecting walls and its portico, and it had openings all around. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide.  37 Its portico faced the outer court; palm trees decorated the jambs on either side, and eight steps led up to it.**

**40:28** *south gate.* Of the inner wall, which is not described but must be assumed. (CSB)

 *it had the same measurements as the others.* In both the outer walls (see note on v. 6). (CSB)

**40:34** *eight steps.* See note on v. 6.2(CSB)

*The Rooms for Preparing Sacrifices*

**38 A room with a doorway was by the portico in each of the inner gateways, where the burnt offerings were washed.  39 In the portico of the gateway were two tables on each side, on which the burnt offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings were slaughtered.  40 By the outside wall of the portico of the gateway, near the steps at the entrance to the north gateway were two tables, and on the other side of the steps were two tables.  41 So there were four tables on one side of the gateway and four on the other—eight tables in all—on which the sacrifices were slaughtered.  42 There were also four tables of dressed stone for the burnt offerings, each a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and a cubit high. On them were placed the utensils for slaughtering the burnt offerings and the other sacrifices.  43 And double-pronged hooks, each a handbreadth long, were attached to the wall all around. The tables were for the flesh of the offerings.**

**40:38** *portico in each of the inner gateways.* The porticoes of the inner gateways were on the side of the outer court, facing away from the temple. (CSB)

 *washed.* The inner parts and the legs were washed (Lev 1:9).

**40:39** *burnt offerings.*† The entire animal was burned in consecration to God (see Lev 1). (CSB)

 *sin offerings and guilt offerings.*† Discussed in Lev 4–7. The fellowship offerings are notable by their absence from this listing (see 43:27; 45:17; 46:2, 12). (CSB)

*Rooms for the Priests*

**44 Outside the inner gate, within the inner court, were two rooms, one at the side of the north gate and facing south, and another at the side of the south gate and facing north.  45 He said to me, “The room facing south is for the priests who have charge of the temple,  46 and the room facing north is for the priests who have charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who are the only Levites who may draw near to the LORD to minister before him.” 47 Then he measured the court: It was square—a hundred cubits long and a hundred cubits wide. And the altar was in front of the temple.**

**40:46** *sons of Zadok.*† For the distinction between the sons of Zadok and the Levites see the fuller discussion in the notes on 44:15–31. Note that no high priest is mentioned because the worshipers are reconciled to God by that High Priest who “entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). (CSB)

**40:47** *altar.* Described in 43:13–17. (CSB)

*The Temple*

**48 He brought me to the portico of the temple and measured the jambs of the portico; they were five cubits wide on either side. The width of the entrance was fourteen cubits and its projecting walls were three cubits wide on either side.  49 The portico was twenty cubits wide, and twelve cubits from front to back. It was reached by a flight of stairs, and there were pillars on each side of the jambs.**

**40:48** *portico.* Similar to the portico in Solomon’s temple but slightly larger (see 1Ki 6:3). (CSB)

**40:49** *pillars.* Called Jakin and Boaz in Solomon’s temple (see 1Ki 7:21). (CSB)

These verses begin the description of the temple itself, which continues in chapter 41. Since the external *realia* of the temple *are* the message throughout the following chapters, beyond this point we shall combine the textual notes and commentary into a single section. In Ezekiel 40–48 it is rarely realistic (or even faithful to authorial intent) to try to separate the details of the text from their theological implication. (CC)