EZEKIEL

Chapter 48

*The Division of the Land*

**“These are the tribes, listed by name: At the northern frontier, Dan will have one portion; it will follow the Hethlon road to Lebo Hamath; Hazar Enan and the northern border of Damascus next to Hamath will be part of its border from the east side to the west side. 2 “Asher will have one portion; it will border the territory of Dan from east to west. 3 “Naphtali will have one portion; it will border the territory of Asher from east to west. 4 “Manasseh will have one portion; it will border the territory of Naphtali from east to west. 5 “Ephraim will have one portion; it will border the territory of Manasseh from east to west. 6 “Reuben will have one portion; it will border the territory of Ephraim from east to west. 7 “Judah will have one portion; it will border the territory of Reuben from east to west. 8 “Bordering the territory of Judah from east to west will be the portion you are to present as a special gift. It will be 25,000 cubits wide, and its length from east to west will equal one of the tribal portions; the sanctuary will be in the center of it. 9 “The special portion you are to offer to the LORD will be 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits wide.  10 This will be the sacred portion for the priests. It will be 25,000 cubits long on the north side, 10,000 cubits wide on the west side, 10,000 cubits wide on the east side and 25,000 cubits long on the south side. In the center of it will be the sanctuary of the LORD.  11 This will be for the consecrated priests, the Zadokites, who were faithful in serving me and did not go astray as the Levites did when the Israelites went astray.  12 It will be a special gift to them from the sacred portion of the land, a most holy portion, bordering the territory of the Levites. 13 “Alongside the territory of the priests, the Levites will have an allotment 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits wide. Its total length will be 25,000 cubits and its width 10,000 cubits.  14 They must not sell or exchange any of it. This is the best of the land and must not pass into other hands, because it is holy to the LORD. 15 “The remaining area, 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long, will be for the common use of the city, for houses and for pastureland. The city will be in the center of it  16 and will have these measurements: the north side 4,500 cubits, the south side 4,500 cubits, the east side 4,500 cubits, and the west side 4,500 cubits.  17 The pastureland for the city will be 250 cubits on the north, 250 cubits on the south, 250 cubits on the east, and 250 cubits on the west.  18 What remains of the area, bordering on the sacred portion and running the length of it, will be 10,000 cubits on the east side and 10,000 cubits on the west side. Its produce will supply food for the workers of the city.  19 The workers from the city who farm it will come from all the tribes of Israel.  20 The entire portion will be a square, 25,000 cubits on each side. As a special gift you will set aside the sacred portion, along with the property of the city. 21 “What remains on both sides of the area formed by the sacred portion and the city property will belong to the prince. It will extend eastward from the 25,000 cubits of the sacred portion to the eastern border, and westward from the 25,000 cubits to the western border. Both these areas running the length of the tribal portions will belong to the prince, and the sacred portion with the temple sanctuary will be in the center of them.  22 So the property of the Levites and the property of the city will lie in the center of the area that belongs to the prince. The area belonging to the prince will lie between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin. 23 “As for the rest of the tribes: Benjamin will have one portion; it will extend from the east side to the west side. 24 “Simeon will have one portion; it will border the territory of Benjamin from east to west. 25 “Issachar will have one portion; it will border the territory of Simeon from east to west. 26 “Zebulun will have one portion; it will border the territory of Issachar from east to west. 27 “Gad will have one portion; it will border the territory of Zebulun from east to west. 28 “The southern boundary of Gad will run south from Tamar to the waters of Meribah Kadesh, then along the Wadi of Egypt to the Great Sea. 29 “This is the land you are to allot as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel, and these will be their portions,” declares the Sovereign LORD.**

**48:1-29** These verses comprise the second of three subsections, demarcated by formulas, within the final divine speech. See “Introduction to the New Promised Land (47:13–48:35)” after the comments on 47:12. The overall boundaries of the new inheritance were given in the first subsection, 47:13–23. In this subsection, the individual allotments to be inherited by the tribes of Israel—and ingrafted aliens alike! (see on 47:21–23)—are given in 48:1–7, 23–28, with a summary statement for both subsections in 48:29. Sandwiched between the two sets of tribal allotments is the description of the holy contribution in 48:8–22. The reason for this structure of the text is because God describes each strip of land, running from east to west, beginning with the northernmost strip, and moving down in a most orderly fashion to each adjacent strip immediately to the south. (CC)

Thus 48:1–29 contains three obvious units: (1) seven tribal allotments (48:1–7); (2) the holy contribution (48:8–22); and (3) the final five tribal allotments (48:23–28, with a summary in 48:29). However, due to the highly repetitive nature of the two units describing the tribal allotments, the comments below will first consider 48:1, then cover the tribal allotments in 48:2–7, 23–29 together, and finally take up the holy contribution (48:8–22). (CC)

**48:1** *Dan.* Occupies its historical location as the northernmost tribe (see the phrase “from Dan to Beersheba,” giving northern and southern boundaries—e.g., in Jdg 20:1; 1Sa 3:20). Dan was born to Rachel’s maidservant Bilhah (Ge 35:25). (CSB)

 *Hethlon … Lebo Hamath.* See note on 47:15. (CSB)

 *Hazar Enan.* See note on 47:16. (CSB)

As a NT parallel to the equal portions of land granted to the twelve tribes, one can note in Rev 7:4–8 the equal numbers of sealed believers from each tribe that total the one hundred forty-four thousand who comprise the new Israel. (CC)

**48:2** *Asher.* Born to Leah’s maidservant Zilpah (Ge 35:26). The tribes descended from maidservants were placed farthest from the sanctuary (see Dan, v. 1; Naphtali, v. 3; Gad, v. 27). (CSB)

**48:3** *Naphtali.* Born to Rachel’s maidservant Bilhah (see note on v. 2). (CSB)

**48:4** *Manasseh.* See note on 47:13. (CSB)

**48:5** *Ephraim.* See note on 47:13. (CSB)

**48:6** *Reuben.* Leah’s firstborn (Ge 29:31). (CSB)

**48:7** *Judah.* Son of Leah (Ge 35:23). He had the most prestigious place, bordering the central holy portion (v. 8), because his tribe was given the Messianic promise (Ge 49:8–12). (CSB)

**48:8–22**† An expansion of 45:1–8. For geographic and topographic reasons a schematic division of the land into parallel strips of equal length and width was an idealistic rather than an actual, realistic program. As Ezekiel’s temple was not built by human hands, so the envisioned promised land need not be acquired by weapons of war. It is God’s to give to a people restored to his favor “in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light” (Col 1:12; cf. Ac 20:32). (CSB)

Throughout these verses the number twenty-five thousand recurs, which probably has symbolical significance comparable to that of “the twenty-fifth year” in 40:1, suggesting a turning point in the redemption of God’s people (see the commentary on 40:1). The measurement of each side of the city is four thousand five hundred (48:16; also 48:30–34), and its circumference is eighteen thousand (48:35). Both of those numbers too are multiples of twenty-five (as are many other numbers throughout chapters 40–48), and they likely share some of the same redemptive significance. (CC)

**48:8** SPECIAL GIFT – In the next verse (48:9), as we shall see, תְּרוּמָה, “contribution,” has a much more restricted application. But the word’s theological meaning in this context is even more significant. In other OT contexts, תְּרוּמָה is a technical sacrificial expression, traditionally rendered “heave offering” (see the commentary on 20:40 and on 44:30; 45:1), referring to certain gifts or offerings dedicated to Yahweh. And as in 45:1, Hebrew can readily use with the noun the cognate verb, the Hiphil of רוּם, “to lift up,” meaning “devote, dedicate, consecrate.” But here the noun is used in a context where Yahweh is the Giver of his land, and the people give back or reserve as a sacrifice of thanksgiving a portion of his gift in recognition that none of it is theirs by birthright; it is in its entirety a divine gift of grace. (CC)

Thus, we have an excellent example of the sacrificial-sacramental duality that pervaded all of Israel’s worship and continues into that of Christianity. Everything begins with and depends on God’s prior gift, centering in Christ and the cross. Then, in voluntary response, believers offer their sacrifices, which are not propitiary, but eucharistic, and which God uses to convey further gifts and/or to continue and strengthen the original gift. Thus those OT sacrifices were in a broader sense “sacramental” and were types of the NT Sacraments, Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Many nugatory debates about whether the OT sacrifices were also “sacraments” and whether our Sacraments are also (eucharistic!) sacrifices (sometimes centering on “eucharistic prayers”) could be avoided if this duality were comprehended. (CC)

 SANCTURAY WILL – While וְהָיָ֥ה הַמִּקְרָּ֖שׁ בְּתוֹכֽוֹ (48:8b) is, literally, “the sanctuary will be in its midst,” the temple is to be in the very center of the priests’ land within the holy contribution, as 48:10b will indicate, using almost the same Hebrew expression. (CC)

**48:9** *10,000 cubits wide.* The width of the entire sacred district was 20,000 cubits (see 45:1). This must refer to the width of either the priests’ or the Levites’ area. The Septuagint reads “20,000.” (CSB)

**48:11** *Zadokites, who were faithful.* See note on 44:15. (CSB)

**48:12** The end of the verse states that the priests’ area adjoins “the territory of the Levites,” thus introducing the next tract of land, to be described in detail in 48:13. Here in 48:12 and also in 48:13, גְּבוּל, which usually means “boundary, border,” refers to the “territory” of the Levites enclosed by its prescribed boundaries. Also twice in 48:22, גְּבוּל refers to a tribal “territory.” (CC)

**48:14** *not sell or exchange.* Since it was the Lord’s, it was not to be an object of commerce. (CSB)

The twofold reason for the prohibitions is simply stated. First, the land (probably the combined tracts of the priests and Levites) is called the רֵאשִׁ֣ית הָאָ֑רֶץ, literally, “the first/firstfruits of the land.” רֵאשִׁית is often used for the offering of “firstfruits” (e.g., Lev 2:12), and also for the first or best of other things (e.g., Gen 49:3). Here the immediate reference is to land dedicated to God for the use of the (priests and) Levites, a part of the תְּרוּמָה, “contribution” (48:8a). The second reason is that כִּי־קֹ֖דֶשׁ לַיהוָֽה, literally, “because it is a holy thing belonging to Yahweh.” In other contexts, קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוה might simply mean that something is “holy (in relation) to Yahweh,” but the larger context here emphasizes that this portion of land “belongs to” Yahweh. (CC)

**48:15** The city’s tract is pronounced חֹֽל־ה֣וּא, literally, “it is common” (48:15). The antecedent of the pronoun ה֣וּא (“it”) is הַנּוֹתָ֣ר (“the remainder”). The form of this nominal sentence is known as a “declaratory judgment.” The same form is used frequently in the Torah for verdicts about the kind or acceptability of sacrifices or other matters—mostly, but not exclusively, liturgical. For instance, God declares about sacrifices and the altar, “it is (most) holy” (e.g., Ex 29:34; 30:10; Lev 7:1, 6). The same form of sentence is used for the sacrifices themselves: for example, “it is a burnt offering” (e.g., Lev 1:13, 17); “it is a sin offering” (e.g., Lev 4:24). The form can also be used negatively, for example, “it/he is unclean” (e.g., Lev 11:38; 13:36) or “it is a perversion” (Lev 18:23). Oftenחֹל has negative connotations, in which cases the translation “profane” may be appropriate, implying defilement, but here its use is quite neutral: simply what is unconsecrated, common, ordinary. (CC)

The whole forensic aspect of the doctrine of justification follows the same pattern: God’s declaration renders believers righteous through faith (e.g., Gen 15:6; Romans 4). (CC)

Two uses for this common space are mentioned. The first is לְמוֹשָׁ֖ב, “for habitation/residence,” meaning unwalled “suburbs” that often surrounded walled cities in antiquity or temporary housing for pilgrims at the great festivals. The second use is וּלְמִגְרָ֑שׁ, “and for open land.” מִגְרָשׁ (repeated in 48:17) was the word used to designate the “pastureland” around the forty-eight Levitical cities that was used for the Levites’ livestock (e.g., Lev 25:34; Num 35:2–5, 7). Its exact use here is less certain, perhaps including agricultural plots (somewhat like typical Russian dachas) for the sustenance of inhabitants, whether permanent or transient. Subsequent verses will provide context for these brief statements. מִגְרָשׁ was used in 45:2 for a border of “open area” around the temple compound. (CC)

**48:16** The feminine suffix on מִרּוֹתֶיהָ֒, “its dimensions,” refers back to הָעִ֖יר, “the city” in 48:15. The MT lists the dimension of four thousand five hundred separately for each of the four sides, emphasizing the city’s symmetry. Assuming that the units are cubits, the dimension is almost one and a half miles or about two and a third kilometers. (If the units were rods, it would be about eight and three-fourths miles or fourteen kilometers.) (CC)

**48:17** This verse lists separately the four equal measurements of the מִגְרָשׁ֙ (“open land”) that surrounded the city on each side, again emphasizing symmetry. Adding the figures of 48:16 and 48:17 together gives us a total of five thousand cubits on each side for the square comprising the city and the open country together. (CC)

**48:18** After the city and its surrounding open land, two areas are “remaining” (the Niphal participle וְהַנּוֹתָ֨ר, as in 48:15, but here referring to subdivisions of the area described there). Within the tract occupied by the city, one lies to the east and one to the west of the city and its open land. Each is a rectangle of five thousand cubits north-to-south and ten thousand cubits east-to-west. These two areas are labeled “agricultural land” because of the description of their use in 48:18–19. (CC)

**48:19** *from all the tribes of Israel.* The sacred district was national property, not the prince’s private domain. (CSB)

God specifies that the workload will be distributed evenly among the twelve tribes, but gives us no more details. The syntax of וְהָעֹבֵ֖ד הָעִ֑יר must be appositional, “the worker, the city,” but we would have expected a plural in a construct phrase, וְעֹבְדֵי־הָעִיר, “and the workers of the city” (as in 48:18), to provide a plural subject for the following plural verb, יַעַבְד֕וּהוּ, “they will work/farm/cultivate it.” Perhaps the plural verb indicates that וְהָעֹבֵ֖ד should be taken as a collective: “the workforce.” The masculine suffix on the verb refers back to וְהַנּוֹתָ֨ר, the “remaining” area in 48:18. (CC)

**48:20** The first half of this verse serves as a summary of the preceding verses about the priests’ land, the Levites’ land, and the tract for the city. These three tracts are said here to comprise כָּל־הַתְּרוּמָ֗ה, “the entire contribution,” which clearly uses “contribution” in a narrower sense than in 48:8, 12, where the “contribution” also included the Prince’s tracts (to be described in 48:21–22; see on 48:8–22). The territories of the priests, the Levites, and the city together comprise a perfect square, whose dimensions are given as twenty-five thousand cubits by twenty-five thousand cubits. (CC)

**48:21-22** These are the last verses in the book about the “Prince.” In 34:23–24 and 37:24–25, Yahweh had promised a future “Prince” in explicitly messianic terms: the King and new David, the Good Shepherd who would tend and feed God’s flock, through whom God would dwell with his people forever, granting them salvation and security. Presumably the “Prince” in chapters 40–48 is the same person, but his royal implications are muted, probably to distance him from the past abusive kings of Israel. Yet the “Prince” has special privileges that in some ways are reminiscent of the high priest (and Ezekiel 40–48 never refers to any other high priest). Only the “Prince” may sit and eat before Yahweh in the vestibule of the outer east gate, through which Yahweh himself had entered his temple (see on 44:3). He also is the one who provides the sacrifices (see on 45:16–17 and 46:2). Thus the major accent in Ezekiel 40–48 seems to be an expression of the premonarchical conviction that Yahweh was Israel’s only real King. The dilemma of the “Prince” will only be resolved by Jesus Christ, who is both true God and true man, and who combines and fulfills the offices of “King of Israel” (Jn 1:49; 12:13) and great High Priest (Hebrews 2–10). (CC)

**48:23** *Benjamin.* Rachel’s son (Ge 35:24). (CSB)

**48:24** *Simeon.* Leah’s son (Ge 35:23). (CSB)

**48:25** *Issachar.* Leah’s son (Ge 35:23). (CSB)

**48:26** *Zebulun.* Leah’s son (Ge 35:23). (CSB)

**48:27** *Gad.* Son of Zilpah, Leah’s maid (see note on v. 2). (CSB)

**48:28** *Tamar.* See note on 47:18. (CSB)

 *Meribah Kadesh.* See note on 47:19. (CSB)

 *Wadi (of Egypt).* See note on 47:19. (CSB)

*The Gates of the City*

**30 “These will be the exits of the city: Beginning on the north side, which is 4,500 cubits long,  31 the gates of the city will be named after the tribes of Israel. The three gates on the north side will be the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah and the gate of Levi. 32 “On the east side, which is 4,500 cubits long, will be three gates: the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin and the gate of Dan. 33 “On the south side, which measures 4,500 cubits, will be three gates: the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar and the gate of Zebulun. 34 “On the west side, which is 4,500 cubits long, will be three gates: the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher and the gate of Naphtali. 35 “The distance all around will be 18,000 cubits. “And the name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE.”**

**48:30-35** Why would God not call the new city by the name Jerusalem? Part of the answer may be that in the coming era, God’s salvation would not be confined to Jerusalem itself, nor would that city even necessarily be a focal point of centripetal force as in the OT, when pilgrimage to Jerusalem was required thrice a year for adult males (Ex 23:14–17; 34:22–23; Deut 16:16). Instead, in the NT era, worship is no longer centered at Jerusalem (Jn 4:20–24) because salvation spreads out centrifugally from Jerusalem to ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). A hint of that was in Ezek 48:8–22, where the city was separated from the temple by the intervening tract of land given the Levites, in stark contrast to the three temples (of Solomon, the second temple, and Herod’s temple) that were within Jerusalem. In the church age, God meets his people in grace wherever the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and the Sacraments are rightly administered. Ultimately, the location where he will dwell intimately with his people is not any place on this earth, but in a new city, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21). That leads to another possible part of the answer. The sordid allegories of unfaithful Israel in Ezekiel 16 and 23 were expressed using the whore named “Jerusalem” who personified the city. The holy city described here is to be the antitype in the sense of the very opposite, representing the virgin bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25–27; Revelation 21–22). (CC)

**48:30** If תּוֹצְאֹ֣ת means “outside bounds” (rather than “exits”), it is not surprising that the next part of the description gives the measurement of the north side of the city (rather than moving on to the gates first). The initial attention devoted to the north side follows the same overall pattern as the north-to-south order of the tribal portions and holy contribution listed in 48:1–28, and even the north-to-south order of the tracts (for the priests, then the Levites, and finally the city) within the holy contribution (48:8–22). Further, the entire vision of chapters 40–48 began with Ezekiel approaching the city and the temple from the north, since he sees them “to the south.” After beginning at the north (48:30), Ezekiel is then shown the east (48:32), south (48:33), and finally the west (48:34) side. We would call it “clockwise.” This is the same geographic order (north, east, south, west) as the overall boundary descriptions of the entire new promised land in 47:15–20. That could imply that the city is depicted as a microcosm of the entire promised land, as also seems to be the case with the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21) in the larger context of the new earth that is a garden paradise (Revelation 22).

**48:31** *Reuben … Judah … Levi.* The three most influential tribes—Reuben, the firstborn; Judah, the Messianic tribe; Levi, the tribe of the priesthood—had gates together on the north side. Since Levi was included in this list, Joseph (v. 32) represented Ephraim and Manasseh (see note on 47:13) in order to keep the number at 12. For the gates cf. Rev 21:12–14. (CSB)

**48:35** *the Lord is there.*† The great decisive word concerning the holy city; in Hebrew *Yahweh-Shammah*, a possible wordplay on *Yerushalayim*, the Hebrew pronunciation of Jerusalem. For other names of Jerusalem see 23:4; Isa 1:26; 60:14; 62:2–4, 12; Jer 3:17; 33:16; Zec 8:3. God’s presence will always hallow the labors and lives of all redeemed, reconciled sinners, until in “the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” there “will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev 21:2–4). (CSB)

The new name may imply an animadversion to the etymological meaning of “Jerusalem” (יְרוּשָׁלַםִ), which apparently in pre-Israelite times meant something like “foundation of [the Canaanite god] Shalem,” attested as early as the Egyptian Execration Texts from the early second millennium b.c. However, it seems likely to me that the name intends to evoke a certain assonance between יהוה שָׁמָּה (*Yhwh shammah*) and יְרוּשָׁלַםִ (*Yerushalayim*), even though “Jerusalem” is absent from the entire vision (chapters 40–48). The new name, יְהוָ֥ה ׀ שָֽׁמָּה, “Yahweh is there,” sounds like a play on the historical name, יְרוּשָׁלַםִ, “Jerusalem,” with the difference between the two suggesting discontinuity (the sinful associations will be gone), while the similarity implies continuity and eschatological fulfillment. (CC)

We should not overlook other poetic and theological appellations for the city of God, all of which end up being essentially synonymous with the one that concludes Ezekiel. Most similar is that of Is 60:14: “the city of Yahweh, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” Theologically most significant in unpacking the significance of Yahweh’s presence “there” (Ezek 48:35) is the promise through Jeremiah (33:15–16) of a “righteous Branch” from the line of David who will cause Judah to be saved and Jerusalem to dwell securely, and “this is [the name] that shall be called to her: ‘Yahweh is our righteousness’ [יְהוָ֥ה ׀ צִדְקֵֽנוּ].” Lutherans in particular have always understood that promise as fulfilled in Christ, whose own “righteousness” is imputed to us through faith (and thus becomes our alien righteousness) by virtue of his vicarious atonement. (CC)

So St. Ezekiel ends with a name that fulfills a basic part of the covenant formula, “[I will] be your God” (Gen 17:7 and many times later with slight variations), as well as the promise “I will dwell in your midst” (Zech 2:10–11 and other times with slight variations). And at the same time, the name is predictive of one name given the Incarnate One himself: “Immanuel [God with us],” born of a virgin (Is 7:14; 8:8; Mt 1:23). Although God through Ezekiel seldom speaks overtly of the personal Messiah, there can be no messianic age in the biblical sense without a personal Messiah. Even though Ezekiel is afforded glimpses of life after the parousia (e.g., the resurrection in 37:1–14), he knows that he himself is not yet there, and his visions remain laden with OT imagery that will be absent from corresponding ones in the NT (e.g., the temple and sacrifices in chapters 40–48). Ezekiel never explains how he deals with this paradox. In that, he is one with all of us who are still in the church militant, where, in a sense, the paradox between the “now” (here) and the “not yet” (there) is even greater. (CC)

This is a thought that, among others, the church today would do well to ponder more. Ezekiel’s often horrendous judgment oracles have been fulfilled in the horrific passion of Christ and his death, into which we have been baptized (Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–14), while we yet await the final judgment. So it is also with Ezekiel’s oracles of salvation, including the extensive vision of the new temple that occupies much of chapters 40–48: they were fulfilled when Jesus raised up the “temple” of his own body on the third day (Jn 2:18–23), yet we wait in hope for our own resurrection on the Last Day. (CC)

“God himself is present: … God is in His temple,” we sing. But in what sense are we privileged to be “there” with him? Not by birthright (cf. Jn 1:12–13), as universalists wrongly contend, but by our second birth through “clean water” and “a new Spirit” (Ezek 36:25–27; Jn 3:5). As we abide in his Word, the triune God himself comes to abide with us (Jn 14:23). Only by constant renewal of our faith in Christ through his gifts—in the places where he has promised to let himself be found, in his Word and at his Altar, which is really his Table (cf. Ezek 41:22)—will we finally arrive in the city where “Yahweh is there.” (CC)

All this means that we enter his temple preeminently in worship, where he is spiritually and sacramentally present. And as the “Jerusalem above” (Ps 137:6; Gal 4:26) descends upon the pilgrim city below, momentarily erasing the boundaries of space and time, we proleptically participate in, but also empirically look forward to, the Day when the last enemy will have been destroyed (1 Cor 15:26, 54), and we, with all the saints in glory already, will forever be “there,” where Yahweh is. “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).(CC)