

CHAPTER 40

The waters of the sanctuary which this prophet saw in vision (47:1) are a proper representation of this prophecy. Hitherto the waters have been sometimes but to the ankles, in other places to the knees, or to the loins, but now the waters have risen, and have become “a river which cannot be passed over.” Here is one continued vision, beginning at this chapter, to the end of the book, which is justly looked upon to be one of the most difficult portions of scripture in all the book of God. The Jews will not allow any to read it till they are thirty years old, and tell those who do read it that, though they cannot understand every thing in it, “when Elias comes he will explain it.” Many commentators, both ancient and modern, have owned themselves at a loss what to make of it and what use to make of it. But because it is hard to be understood we must not therefore throw it by, but humbly search concerning it, get as far as we can into it and as much as we can out of it, and, when we despair of satisfaction in every difficulty we meet with, bless God that our salvation does not depend upon it, but that things necessary are plain enough, and wait till God shall reveal even this unto us. These chapters are the more to be regarded because the last two chapters of the Revelation seem to have a plain allusion to them, as Revelation 20 has to the foregoing prophecy of Gog and Magog. Here is the vision of a glorious temple (in this chapter and Ezekiel 41 and 42), of God's taking possession of it (Ezekiel 43), orders concerning the priests that are to minister in this temple (Ezekiel 44), the division of the land, what portion should be allotted for the sanctuary, what for the city, and what for the prince, both in his government of the people and his worship of God (Ezekiel 45), and further instructions for him and the people, Ezekiel 46. After the vision of the holy waters we have the borders of the holy land, and the portions assigned to the tribes, and the dimensions and gates of the holy city, Ezekiel 47, 48. Some make this to represent what had been during the flourishing state of the Jewish church, how glorious Solomon's temple was in its best days, that the captives might see what they had lost by sin and might be the more humbled. But that seems not probable. The general scope of it I take to be,

1. To assure the captives that they should not only return to their own land, and be settled there, which had been often promised in the foregoing chapters, but that they should have, and therefore should be encouraged to build, another temple, which God would own, and where he would meet them and bless them, that the ordinances of worship should be revived, and the sacred priesthood should there attend; and, though they should not have a king to live in such splendour as formerly, yet they should have a prince or ruler (who is often spoken of in this vision), who should countenance the worship of God among them and should himself be an example of diligent attendance upon it, and that prince, priests, and people, should have a very comfortable settlement and subsistence in their own land.

2. To direct them to look further than all this, and to expect the coming of the Messiah, who had before been prophesied of under the name of David because he was the man that projected the building of the temple and that should set up a spiritual temple, even the gospel-church, the glory of which should far exceed that of Solomon's temple, and which should continue to the end of time. The dimensions of these visionary buildings being so large (the new temple more spacious than all the old Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem of greater extent than all the land of Canaan) plainly intimates, as Dr. Lightfoot observes, that these things cannot be literally, but must spiritually, understood. At the gospel-temple, erected by Christ and his apostles, was so closely connected with the second material temple, was erected so carefully just at the time when that fell into decay, that it might be ready to receive its glories when it resigned them, that it was proper enough that they should both be referred to in one and the same vision. Under the type and figure of a temple and altar, priests and sacrifices, is foreshown the spiritual worship that should be performed in gospel times, more agreeable to the nature both of God and man, and that perfected at last in the kingdom of glory, in which perhaps these visions will have their full accomplishment, and some think in some happy and glorious state of the gospel-church on this side heaven, in the latter days.

In this chapter we have,

I. A general account of this vision of the temple and city (v. 1-4).

II. A particular account of it entered upon; and a description given,

1. Of the outside wall (v. 5).
2. Of the east gate (v. 6-19).
3. Of the north gate (v. 20-23).
4. Of the south gate (v. 24-31) and the chambers and other appurtenances belonging to these gates.
5. Of the inner court, both towards the east and towards the south (v. 32-38).
6. Of the tables (v. 39-43).
7. Of the lodgings for the singers and the priests (v. 44-47).
8. Of the porch of the house (v. 48, 49).

~~301~~ EZEKIEL 40:1-4

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

Here is,

1. The date of this vision. It was in the twenty-fifth year of Ezekiel's captivity (v. 1), which some compute to be the thirty-third year of the first captivity, and is here said to be the *fourteenth year after the city was smitten*. See how seasonably the clearest and fullest prospects of their deliverance were given, when they were in the depth of their distress, and an assurance of the return of the morning when they were in the midnight of their captivity: "Then *the hand of the Lord was upon me and brought me thither* to Jerusalem, now that it was in ruins, desolate and deserted" — a pitiable sight to the prophet.
2. The scene where it was laid. The prophet was brought, *in the visions of God, to the land of Israel*, v. 2. And it was not the first time that he had been brought thither in vision. We had him carried to Jerusalem to see it in its iniquity and shame (~~2008~~ Ezekiel 8:3); here he is carried thither to have a pleasing prospect of it in its glory, though its present aspect, now that it

was quite depopulated, was dismal. He was set *upon a very high mountain*, as Moses upon the top of Pisgah, to view this land, which was now a second time a *land of promise*, not yet in possession. From the top of this mountain he saw *as the frame of a city*, the plan and model of it; but this city was a temple as large as a city. The *New Jerusalem* (⁶⁰²Revelation 21:22) had *no temple therein*; this which we have here is *all temple*, which comes much to one. It is a city for men to dwell in; it is a temple for God to dwell in; for in the church on earth God dwells with men, in that in heaven men dwell with God. Both these are framed in the counsel of God, framed by infinite wisdom, and all very good.

3. The particular discoveries of this city (which he had at first a general view of) were made to him by *a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass* (v. 3), not a created angel, but Jesus Christ, who should be found in fashion as a man, that he might both discover and build the gospel-temple. He brought him to this city, for it is through Christ that we have both acquaintance with and access to the benefits and privileges of God's house. He it is that *shall build the temple of the Lord*, ³⁸³Zechariah 6:13. His appearing like brass intimates both his brightness and his strength. John, in vision, saw *his feet like unto fine brass*, ⁴¹⁵Revelation 1:15.

4. The dimensions of this city or temple, and the several parts of it, were taken with a *line of flax* and a *measuring reed*, or *rod* (v. 3), as carpenters have both their line and a wooden measure. The temple of God is built by line and rule; and those that would let others into the knowledge of it must do it by that line and rule. The church is formed according to the scripture, *the pattern in the mount*. That is the line and the measuring reed that is in the hand of Christ. With that doctrine and laws ought to be measured, and examined by that; for then peace is upon the Israel of God when they *walk according to that rule*.

5. Directions are here given to the prophet to receive this revelation from the Lord and transmit it pure and entire to the church, v. 4.

(1.) He must carefully observe every thing that was said and done in this vision. His attention is raised and engaged (v. 4): "*Behold with thy eyes all that is shown thee* (do not only see it, but look intently upon it), and *hear with thy ears all that is said to thee*; diligently hearken to it, and be sure *to set thy heart upon it*; attend with a fixedness of thought and a close application of mind." What we see of the works of God, and what we hear

of the word of God, will do us no good unless we set out hearts upon it, as those that reckon ourselves nearly concerned in it, and expect advantage to our souls by it.

(2.) He must faithfully *declare it to the house of Israel*, that they may have the comfort of it. Therefore he receives, that he may give. Thus the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* was lodged in the hands of John, that he might signify it to the churches, ~~401~~ Revelation 1:1. And, because he is to declare it as a message from God, he must therefore be fully apprised of it himself and much affected with it. Note, Those who are to preach God's word to others ought to study it well themselves and set their hearts upon it. Now the reason given why he must both observe it himself and declare it to the house of Israel is because to this intent he is brought hither, and has it shown to him. Note, When the things of God are shown to us it concerns us to consider to what intent they are shown to us, and, when we are sitting under the ministry of the word, to consider to what intent we are brought thither, that we may answer the end of our coming, and may not receive the grace of God, in showing us such things, in vain.

~~3418~~ EZEKIEL 40:5-26

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

The measuring-reed which was in the hand of the surveyor-general was mentioned before, v. 3. Here we are told (v. 5) what was the exact length of it, which must be observed, because the house was measured by it. It was *six cubits long*, reckoning, not by the common cubit, but the *cubit of the sanctuary*, the sacred cubit, by which it was fit that this holy house should be measured, and that was a hand-breadth (that it, four inches) longer than the common cubit: the common cubit was eighteen inches, this twenty-two, see ~~3583~~ Ezekiel 43:13. Yet some of the critics contend that this *measuring-reed* was but six common cubits in length, and one handbreadth added to the whole. The former seems more probable. Here is an account,

I. Of the outer wall of the house, which encompassed it round, which was three yards thick and three yards high, which denotes the separation between the church and the world on every side and the divine protection which the church is under. If a wall of this vast thickness will not secure it,

God himself will be *a wall of fire round about it*; whoever attack it will do so at their peril.

II. Of the several gates with the chambers adjoining to them. Here is no mention of the outer court of all, which was called the *court of the Gentiles*, some think because in gospel-times there should be such a vast confluence of Gentiles to the church that their court should be left unmeasured, to signify that the worshippers in that court should be unnumbered, ⁽⁶¹³⁾ Revelation 7:9, 11, 12.

1. He begins with the *east gate*, because that was the usual way of entering into the lower end of the temple, the holy of holies being at the west end, in opposition to the idolatrous heathen that worshipped towards the east. Now, in the account of this gate, observe,

(1.) That he went up to it by *stairs* (v. 6), for the gospel-church was exalted above that of the Old Testament, and when we go to worship God we must ascend; so is the call, ⁽⁶¹⁴⁾ Revelation 4:1. Come up hither. *Sursum corda — Up with your hearts.*

(2.) That the chambers adjoining to the gates were but *little chambers*, about ten feet square, v. 7. These were for those to lodge in who attended the service of the house. And it becomes such as are made spiritual priests to God to content themselves with little chambers and not to seek great things to themselves; so that we may but have a place within the verge of God's court we have reason to be thankful though it be in a little chamber, a mean apartment, though we be but door-keepers there.

(3.) The chambers, as they were each of them four-square, denoting their stability and due proportion and their exact agreement with the rule (for they were each of them one reed long and one reed broad), so they were all of *one measure*, that there might be an equality among the attendants on the service of the house.

(4.) The chambers were very many; for in our Father's house there are *many mansions* (⁽⁶¹⁵⁾ John 14:2), in his house above, and in that here on earth. In the secret of his tabernacle shall those be hid, and in a safe pavilion, whose desire is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their life, ⁽⁶¹⁶⁾ Psalm 27:4, 5. Some make these chambers to represent the particular congregations of believers, which are parts of the great temple, the universal church, which are, and must be, framed by the scripture-line

and rule, and which Jesus Christ takes the measure of, that is, takes cognizance of, for he walks in the midst of the seven golden candle-sticks.

(5.) It is said (v. 14), *He made also the posts*. He that now measured them was the same that made them; for Christ is the builder of his church and therefore is best able to give us the knowledge of it. And his reducing them to the rule and standard is called his making them, for no account is made of them further than they agree with that. *To the law and to the testimony*.

(6.) Here are posts of sixty cubits, which, some think, was literally fulfilled when Cyrus, in his edict for rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, ordered that the height thereof should be sixty cubits, that is, thirty yards and more, ^{106} Ezra 6:3.

(7.) Here were windows to the little chambers, and windows to *the posts and arches* (that is, to the cloisters below), and *windows round about* (v. 16), to signify the light from heaven with which the church is illuminated; divine revelation is let into it for instruction, direction, and comfort, to those that dwell in God's house, light to work by, light to walk by, light to see themselves and one another by. There were lights to the little chambers; even the least, and least considerable, parts and members of the church, shall have light afforded them. *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord*. But they are *narrow windows*, as those in the temple, ^{106} 1 Kings 6:4. The discoveries made to the church on earth are but narrow and scanty compared with what shall be in the future state, when we shall no longer *see through a glass darkly*.

(8.) Divers courts are here spoken of, an outermost of all, then an outer court, then an inner, and then the innermost of all, into which the priests only entered, which (some think) may put us in mind “of the diversities of gifts, and graces, and offices, in the several members of Christ's mystical body here, as also of the several degrees of glory in the courts and mansions of heaven, as there are stars in several spheres and stars of several magnitudes in the fixed firmament.” *English Annotations*. Some draw nearer to God than others and have a more intimate acquaintance with divine things; but to a child of God a day in any of his courts is *better than a thousand* elsewhere. These courts had porches, or piazzas, round them, for the shelter of those that attended in them from wind and weather; for when we are in the way of our duty to God we may believe ourselves to be under his special protection, that he will graciously provide

for us, nay, that he will himself be to us *a covert from the storm and tempest*, ^{<346>}Isaiah 4:5, 6.

(9.) On the posts were palm-trees engraven (v. 16), to signify that *the righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree* in the courts of God's house, ^{<347>}Psalms 92:12. The more they are depressed with the burden of affliction the more strongly do they grow, as they say of the palm-trees. It likewise intimates the saints' victory and triumph over their spiritual enemies; they have *palms in their hands* (^{<348>}Revelation 7:9); but lest they should drop these, or have them snatched out of their hands, they are here engraven upon the posts of the temple as perpetual monuments of their honour. *Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph*. Nay, believers shall themselves be made pillars in the temple of our God, and shall *go no more out*, and shall have his name engraven on them, which will be their brightest ornament and honour, ^{<349>}Revelation 3:12.

(10.) Notice is here taken of the pavement of the court, v. 17, 18. The word intimates that the pavement was made of *porphyry-stone*, which was of the colour of *burning coals*; for the brightest and most sparkling glories of this world should be put and kept under our feet when we draw near to God and are attending upon him. The stars are, as it were, the *burning coals*, or stones of a *fiery colour*, with which the pavement of God's celestial temple is laid; and, if the pavement of the court be so bright and glittering, how glorious must we conclude the mansions of that house to be!

2. The gates that looked towards the north (v. 20) and towards the south (v. 24), with their appurtenances, are much the same with that towards the east, *after the measure of the first gate*, v. 21. But the description is repeated very particularly. And thus largely was the structure of the tabernacle related in Exodus, and of the temple in the books of Kings and Chronicles, to signify the special notice God does take, and his ministers should take, of all that belong to his church. His delight is in them; his eye is upon them. He knows all that are his, all his living temples and all that belongs to them. Observe,

(1.) This temple had not only a gate towards the east, to let into it the *children of the east*, that were famous for their wealth and wisdom, but it had a gate to the north, and another to the south, for the admission of the poorer and less civilized nations. The new Jerusalem has *twelve gates*,

three towards each quarter of the world (^{<6213>}Revelation 21:13); for many shall come from all parts to sit down there, ^{<4081>}Matthew 8:11.

(2.) To those gates they went up by steps, *seven steps* (v. 22-26), which, as some observe, may remind us of the necessity of advancing in grace and holiness, adding one grace to another, going from step to step, *from strength to strength*, still pressing forward towards perfection — upward, upward, towards heaven, the temple above.

^{<3417>}EZEKIEL 40:27-38

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

In these verses we have a delineation of the inner court. The survey of the outer court ended with the south side of it. This of the inner court begins with the south side (v. 27), proceeds to the east (v. 32), and so to the north (v. 35); for here is no gate either of the outer or inner court towards the *west*. It should seem that in Solomon's temple there were gates westward, for we find porters towards the west, ^{<1392>}1 Chronicles 9:24; 26:8. But Josephus says that in the second temple there was no gate on the west side. Observe,

1. These gates into the inner court were exactly uniform with those into the outer court, the dimensions the same, the chambers adjoining the same, the galleries or rows round the court the same, and the very engravings on the posts the same. The work of grace, and its workings, are the same, for substance, in grown Christians that they are in young beginners, only that the former have got so much nearer their perfection. The faith of all the saints is alike precious, though it be not alike strong. There is a great resemblance between one child of God and another; for *all they are brethren* and bear the same image.

2. The ascent into the outer court at each gate was by *seven steps*, but the ascent into the inner court at each gate was by *eight steps*. This is expressly taken notice of (v. 31, 34, 37), to signify that the nearer we approach to God the more we should rise above this world and the things of it. The people, who worshipped in the outer court, must rise seven steps above other people, but the priests, who attended in the inner court, must

rise eight steps above them, must exceed them at least one step more than they exceed other people.

~~34B~~ EZEKIEL 40:39-49

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

In these verses we have an account,

I. Of the tables that were in the porch of the gates of the inner court. We find no description of the altars of burnt-offerings in the midst of that court till ~~34B~~ Ezekiel 43:13. But, because the one altar under the law was to be exchanged for a multitude of tables under the gospel, here is *early notice* taken of the tables, at our entrance into the inner court; for till we come to partake of the *table of the Lord* we are but professors at large; our admission to that is our entrance into the inner court. But in this gospel-temple we meet with no altar till after the glory of the Lord has taken possession of it, for Christ is our altar, that sanctifies every gift. Here were eight tables provided, whereon to *slay the sacrifices*, v. 41. We read not of any tables for this purpose either in the tabernacle or in Solomon's temple. But here they are provided, to intimate the multitude of spiritual sacrifices that should be brought to God's house in gospel-times, and the multitude of hands that should be employed in offering up those sacrifices. Here were the shambles for the altar; here were the dressers on which they laid the flesh of the sacrifice, the knives with which they cut it up, and the hooks on which they hung it up, that it might be ready to be offered on the altar (v. 43), and there also they washed the burnt-offerings (v. 38), to intimate that before we draw near to God's altar we must have every thing in readiness, must wash our hands, our hearts, those spiritual sacrifices, and so *compass God's altar*.

II. The use that some of the chambers mentioned before were put to.

1. Some were for the *singers*, v. 44. It should seem they were first provided for before any other that attended this temple-service, to intimate, not only that the singing of psalms should still continue a gospel-ordinance, but that the gospel should furnish all that embrace it with abundant matter for joy and praise, and give them occasion to *break forth into singing*, which is often foretold concerning gospel times, ~~39B~~ Psalm

96:1; 98:1. Christians should be singers. *Blessed are those that dwell in God's house, they will be still praising him.*

2. Others of them were for *the priests*, both those that kept *the charge of the house*, to cleanse it, and to see that none came into it to pollute it, and to keep it in good repair (v. 45), and those that *kept the charge of the altar* (v. 46), that *came near to the Lord to minister to him*. God will find convenient lodging for all his servants. Those that do the work of his house shall enjoy the comforts of it.

III. Of the inner court, the court of the priests, which was fifty yards square, v. 47. The altar that *was before the house* was placed in the midst of this court, over-against the three gates, and, standing in a direct line with the three gates of the outer court, when the gates were set open all the people in the outer court might through them be spectators of the service done at the altar. Christ is both our altar and our sacrifice, to whom we must look with an eye of faith in all our approaches to God, and he is salvation in the midst of the earth (¹⁵⁷⁴Psalm 74:12), to be looked unto from all quarters.

IV. Of the porch of the house. The temple is called the house, emphatically, as if no other house were worthy to be called so. Before this house there was a porch, to teach us not to rush hastily and inconsiderately into the presence of God, but gradually, that is, gravely, and with solemnity, passing first through the outer court, then the inner, then the porch, ere we enter into the house. Between this porch and the altar was a place where the priests used to pray, ²⁰¹⁷Joel 2:17. In the porch, besides the posts on which the doors were hung, there were pillars, probably for state and ornament, like *Jachin* and *Boaz* — *He will establish; in him is strength*, v. 49. In the gospel church every thing is strong and firm, and every thing ought to be kept in its place and to be done decently and in order.