

Ezekiel's Movements in 42:1 – 44:4

Peter Schmidt. Rev. 2023. Text by NASB, unless indicated otherwise.

This concerns foremostly the understanding and translation of Ezek. 43:1 and 44:1. Earlier and later movements of Ezekiel seem to be less problematic, and are not discussed (except for an appendix regarding 40:32).¹ The question is where we should picture Ezekiel standing in the Temple compound.²

I also alert the translator to two different meanings of the phrase דֶּרֶךְ שַׁעַר *derek ša'ar*, which comes up repeatedly. This matters for translation. I include a note on the variant דֶּרֶךְ אֵלֶם הַשַּׁעַר *derek ulām hašša'ar*, which concerns the vestibule and the movements of the prince.

Terminology: I distinguish between the “inner court”, the “outer court”, and the “whole Temple compound” (= everything, including the outer wall).

Summary

- In 43:1, Ezekiel is **outside the whole Temple compound**, in front of the outer eastern gate.
- In 44:1, Ezekiel is **in the outer court**, in front of the **outer** eastern gate.
If these two points are explicated in translation, it is easier for the reader to follow the overall description.
- דֶּרֶךְ שַׁעַר (ה) usually means “by / by way of / through the gate”, but in 44:1 it means “in direction of / to the gate”, and in 44:3, מִדֶּרֶךְ אֵלֶם הַשַּׁעַר means “from the vestibule’s side”.
- The prince eats his meal in the vestibule of the **outer** gatehouse (44:3).
- The prince witnesses the offering of the burnt- and peace offering from the **inner** gatehouse (46:2).

Exposition of Ezekiel's movements

42:1

Then he brought me out into the outer court, the way toward the north.

► **Ezekiel is now in the outer court, in the north-west quarter.**

○ Ezekiel's guide shows him the dining rooms and explains their function.

42:15

ESV: Now when he had finished measuring the interior of the temple area, he led me out by the gate that faced east, and measured the temple area all around.

¹ Block (NICOT, 1998), fig. 2, p. 509, shows Ezekiel's Temple tour, but ends with his movements in 42:15-20.

² The view presented here differs from the one in the *UBS Handbook*.

► **Ezekiel is now outside the whole Temple compound, in front of the outer eastern gate.**

○ Vv. 16-19: Ezekiel's guide measures the Temple compound's eastern, northern, southern, and western outer walls.

42:19

He turned to the west side and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.

The measuring of the Temple compound's outer walls ends on the western side.

► **Ezekiel is now outside the whole Temple compound, on the western side.**

○ It follows 42:20 as the end of the chapter with a summary statement.

43:1-2

¹ Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; ² and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east.

Now the prophet is taken back to where the first tour began, for the new start.

► **Option 1: Ezekiel is now outside the whole Temple compound, in front of the outer eastern gate.**

From here, he watches the Glory entering. When 44:2 says "This gate shall be shut; ... for the Lord God of Israel has entered by it.", it is talking about the outer gate (see 44:1, and remarks below).

The Glory had to pass through the inner gate as well, but it makes sense to take the outer one as the point of departure, especially since the coming of the Glory out of the east is described. I reckon it came from far away.³ In addition, what speaks for Ezekiel being in front of the outer gate is that he sees how "the land was radiant with his glory" (43:2 NIV). How would Ezekiel observe this if he stood inside the court, with a 3 meter high wall around him? – A translation that reflects this option for 43:1 well is NLT:

After this, the man brought me back around to the east gateway.

> Option 2: Ezekiel is now in the *outer court*, in front of the *outer* eastern gate.

Many commentators talk about the outer gate, but it does not become really clear whether they think of Ezekiel watching it from the very outside (Option 1; so Block (NICOT, 1998)? Thompson (CBC, 2010)?), or from the outer court (Option 2; so Keil (KD, 1868, German ed., pp. 444-447)? Zimmerli (BKAT, 1969)? Allen (WBC, 1990)? Maier (WSB, 1998)?).⁴

> Option 3: Ezekiel is now in the *outer court*, in front of the *inner* eastern gate.

Handbook:

Presumably, after the angelic guide had measured the outer wall that surrounded the whole compound (42.15-20), he and Ezekiel returned to the gateway in the outer wall, from where they started (see 42.15). If so, the phrase he brought me probably indicates that they moved to a different place, namely, to the east gateway in the inner wall.

³ The Glory had "departed from the threshold of the temple", then "stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house", and later "went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city" (10:18-19; 11:23).

⁴ That we find the verb שׁוּב 'return' in 44:1 does not really help to decide. By the time we get to 44:1, Ezekiel has been on both sides of the outer gate, so he could "return" to either.

But since no returning is mentioned in 42:19-20, I reckon it only happened in 43:1.

- Ezekiel witnesses the glory of the LORD entering (43:4):

And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east.

❖ *Side note on the Glory entering the Temple*

Option 1

Firstly, the Glory passes through the outer eastern gate (43:4b) (see Keil).

Secondly, the Glory passes through the inner eastern gate. This step is skipped in the report. The account is abbreviated. Zimmerli (p. 1076):

Es ist ... selbstverständlich mit dem Durchzug durch die beiden Tore gerechnet. (= The passing through both gates is reckoned with as a matter of course.)

Thirdly, the Glory enters the “house”, i.e. the Temple (43:4a).

Option 2

Firstly, the Glory passes through the outer eastern gate. It is *this* step that is unmentioned in the abbreviated account.

Secondly, the Glory passes through the inner eastern gate (43:4b).

Thirdly, the Glory enters the “house”, i.e. the Temple (43:4a).

What could speak for this view is that the inner gate is closer to the Temple building and they are mentioned in the same verse.

But what strongly speaks against it is that according to 44:2, it is the outer gate that “shall not be opened ... , for the Lord God of Israel has entered by it”. By contrast, the inner gate could still be opened at certain times.

Either way, when Ezekiel says “the glory of the Lord came into the house”, he describes something that he found out about afterwards, because in 43:5, he is put into the inner court, which means that he must have been in the outer court before, or outside the whole Temple compound.

43:5

And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.

► **Ezekiel is now in the inner court, in front of the Temple building.**

- Ezekiel is told to pass on the call for repentance (43:6-12).
- Ezekiel learns about the altar, its measurements and its inauguration (43:13–27).

❖ *Side note on the translation of the verb מָלֵא mālē’*

Most English versions say the glory “filled” the Temple. This could be understood as process or result – either as in these versions:

Allen: I observed the glory filling the Temple.

NET: I watched the glory of the LORD filling the temple.

... or as in these versions:

GNT: I saw that the Temple was filled with the glory of the Lord

CEV: I saw that the Lord's glory had filled the temple.

The Hebrew form מָלֵא *mālē'* can be analyzed in both ways, but since we read already in v. 4 that the Glory came into the Temple, the second pair of examples is to be preferred.

Note that the same does not necessarily apply in 44:4, although the verb form מָלֵא *mālē'* is identical there. Since the reader already knows that the Glory filled the Temple, here Ezekiel might describe the ongoing state. See GNT, for instance:

I saw that the Temple of the Lord was filled with the dazzling light of his presence

NIV says:

I looked and saw the glory of the Lord filling the temple.

This is ambivalent. It could describe the process of filling (but that has already happened), or the ongoing being-filled (which makes sense here). If one wanted to be overly explicit, one could say "was still filling".

Cook (AB, 2018) translated "filled" in 43:5, but on 44:4 notes that here the verb "may be parsed as a participle, so that the prophet watches the Presence *continue* "filling" the shrine" [emphasis in the original].

44:1

NRSV: Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut.⁵

This is to be preferred over NASB (below), see comments on the phrase מַעֲרָבָה at the end.

NASB: Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut.

"Outer gate of the sanctuary" sounds vague. More explicit are these versions:

GCL: Der Mann brachte mich wieder zum östlichen Tor des äußeren Vorhofs. (= The man brought me back to the eastern gate of the outer court.)

HFA: Der Mann ..., ging nun mit mir vom inneren Vorhof wieder zurück zum Osttor der äußeren Tempelmauer. (= The man ... now went with me from the inner court back to the east gate of the outer Temple wall.)

Ezekiel is at the outer eastern gate. But on which side of it?

► Option 1: **Ezekiel is now in the outer court, in front of the outer eastern gate.**

Allen:

From the inner court Ezekiel is taken to the outer court, near its east gateway. He is able to glimpse its closed doors at the far end of the long corridor of the gatehouse.

This makes good sense. Last, Ezekiel was in the inner court. Why move him further out (even outside the whole Temple compound) than needed?⁶

⁵ "Outer gate" is correct, unless one reads "outer sanctuary", but that would be quite strange, because in chapters 40–48, מַעֲרָבָה *hîṣḥôn* is always related to the outer *court*, except for 41:17, which has a different context.

⁶ The next movement, which reports that Ezekiel goes through the north gate to the front of the Temple building (44:4), does not help in deciding whether he came from the outer court or from outside the whole complex.

> Option 2: Ezekiel is now *outside the Temple compound*, in front of the outer eastern gate.

The situation with the commentaries is similar to the one for 43:1: many speak of the outer gate (so Keil, Taylor (TOTC, 1969), Maier, Thompson), but do not explicitly state on which side of the outer gate Ezekiel stands – in the outer court or outside of the whole Temple compound. This last option is at least a possibility. After all, the remark that the gate “was shut” suggests that Ezekiel finds himself right in front of the front door. I suppose most commentators think of Option 1 though. Zimmerli and Block do not discuss the issue.

Either way, the commentators’ view is that Ezekiel is looking at the *outer* eastern gate. Therefore, it is surprising that the *Handbook* has a different take:

> Option 3: Ezekiel is now in the *outer court*, in front of the *inner* eastern gate.

Handbook:

Brought me back is literally “caused me to return.” **The outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east** refers to the east gateway of the Temple’s inner courtyard, where Ezekiel was when he saw the glory of the LORD come back into the Temple (43.1). In 43.5 God’s spirit had taken him into the inner courtyard to see the glory of the LORD in the Temple, and the phrase **brought me back** implies that he now returned to the same gate where he was before. **The outer gate of the sanctuary** does not refer to the doors of the Temple itself, but to the gateway into the inner courtyard around the Temple. **The outer gate** was the outer door of the gateway, the one that opened into the outer courtyard. Ezekiel was probably standing in the outer courtyard outside the east gateway to the inner courtyard. CEV provides a helpful model for this clause, saying “The man took me back to the outer courtyard, near the east gate of the temple area.” Some translations follow a different interpretation and state that Ezekiel went back to “the east gateway in the outer wall of the Temple area” (NLT; similarly NCV, JB/NJB), but we do not recommend this view.

What speaks against the *Handbook*’s position is that the text says *הַיְצוֹן הַיְצוֹן* *hîṣōn* ‘outer’. It is artificial to read this as “outer *doors* [of the inner gatehouse]”. In chapters 40–48, the word occurs 17 times and is always related to the outer *court* (except for 41:17, which has a different context).

44:4

Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord, and I fell on my face.

Probably, Ezekiel had to make the detour and could not go through the inner east gate, because that was closed, like the outer east gate.

In the above verse, it could help to say “He brought me by way of the *inner* north gate ...”.

► **Ezekiel is now in the inner court, in front of the Temple building again.**

Translation

Since there is hardly any model, I am hesitant to say that Ezekiel’s position in 43:1 and 44:1 should be made explicit. But the reader is not served well if he is left wondering where to picture Ezekiel. He should rather be free to focus on the

descriptions that follow. They are complicated enough as they are. Therefore I prefer something like this:

43:1 He led me back in front of [i.e., outside of] the outer eastern gate.

44:1 He brought me back into the outer court to the outer eastern gate of the sanctuary compound.

See the figure at the end of the paper.

The phrase **דָּרַךְ שַׁעַר**

A.) In Ezek. 40–48, **דָּרַךְ שַׁעַר** (דָּרַךְ) usually means “**by / by way of / through the gate**” (as, for instance, also in 2Ki. 11:19). This applies in:

43:4; 44:4; 46:9 (5x); 47:2.

For example, 43:4 (ESV):

As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, ...

Since the goal of movement is the inside of the Temple, the phrase cannot mean “to the gate”.

In 44:4, NASB says correctly:

Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house.

Elberfelder says instead:

Und er brachte mich auf dem Weg zum Nordtor an die Vorderseite des Tempelhauses. (= And he brought me on the way to the north gate to the front side of the temple-house.)

This is not reasonable. It makes it sound as if the front side of the Temple is one point on the way to the north gate. But in reality, it is the other way round. Ezekiel is taken to the front of the Temple, and in order to get there, he has to pass through the north gate. So the gate is a point on the way.

B.) However, in 44:1 it is different. NASB reads:

Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut.

But how can Ezekiel be led “by the way of the gate” when it was shut?! Here, **דָּרַךְ** must mean “**in direction of / to**”. This is found in NRSV (and many others):

Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut.

Cf. Ezek. 9:2 (with **מִן** though), where several English versions have “from the direction of the upper gate”.

C.) As for 42:15, most English versions have “he led me out by the gate that faced east” or similar, but Luther and German NLT go for “hinaus zum Osttor” (= out to the east gate). Here, both is possible, but the English versions are to be preferred, because what follows is the measuring of the outer walls.

D.) **דָּרַךְ אֵלֶם הַשַּׁעַר**

❖ *Side note on the prince and the gates*

The prince **eats the sacrificial meal** in the vestibule of the **outer** gatehouse (44:3) (see Duguid, NIVAC, 1999; Maier).

The prince **witnesses his burnt- and peace offering** (executed by the priests) from the **inner** gatehouse (46:2; cf. v. 8).

Where דָּרָךְ שַׁעַר is combined with אֶלֶם ‘vestibule/porch’, the issue is always how the prince is supposed to enter the gatehouse. But there are two different cases:

1.

44:3 (with מִן): “He shall enter by way of the porch of the gate.”

When the prince enters the outer gate from the outer court, the vestibule/porch is the first room into which he will step. Since he shall eat his meal there, there is no need for him to go any further.

Translation: “By way of the vestibule of the gate” (so or similar all English versions in 44:3) is perhaps not helpful, because it could sound as if he crosses the vestibule and goes further inside. CEVUS06 avoids this by saying:

..., but he must use only the entrance room of this gate.

An alternative could be “He must enter from the vestibule’s side.”

GCL helpfully explicates that he enters “vom Vorhof her” (= “[coming] from the court[’s side]”). However, what is wrong is that it says “vom *inneren* Vorhof her” (= “from the *inner* court”).⁷ That is not possible for two reasons: (1.) Except for the priests, nobody is allowed to enter the inner court. (2.) The gatehouse’s vestibule is on the side of the outer court, not the inner one.

2.

46:2: “The prince shall enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside and stand by the post of the gate. Then the priests shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate and then go out.”

The phrase occurs in the same sense also twice in v. 8 (once with פֶּתַח).

The prince enters the inner gatehouse from the outer court. He first steps into the vestibule/porch. Then it says he shall “stand by the post of the gate”. We cannot tell for sure whether this is at the front or the back end of the gatehouse. It could be on its inner side, because he observes the sacrificial procedures at the altar. Thus, after stepping into the vestibule he has to pass the guard chambers and stop at the threshold, without entering the inner court.

Translation: Here, “by way of the porch” rightly conveys the idea that he traverses the vestibule/porch, and walks further inside.

The figure below shows Ezekiel’s probable position in 43:1 and 44:1.

⁷ Orig.: “Der regierende Fürst darf im Torbau Platz nehmen, wenn er seinen Anteil am Opfermahl verzehrt. Er betritt ihn vom inneren Vorhof her durch die Vorhalle und verlässt ihn wieder auf demselben Weg.”

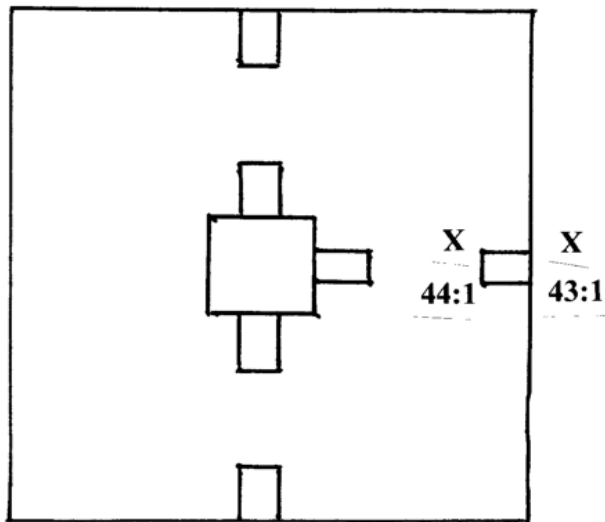


Figure 1: Ezekiel's Position in 43:1 and 44:1

Appendix

40:32: not “into the inner court”, but “to the eastern side of the inner court”

On 40:32, the *Handbook* states:

“Next Ezekiel’s guide led him back into the inner courtyard, this time through its east gatehouse.”

GNT and the German HFA have it like that as well.

But this is unlikely. It would mean Ezekiel and his guide had left the inner court again after v. 28!

It is preferable to go by one of the following models.

GCL: Dann führte der Mann mich auf die Ostseite und vermaß das dort gelegene Tor. (= Then the man lead me to the east side and measured the gate situated there.)

NJPS: Then he took me to the eastern side of the inner forecourt.

Or: He lead me further into the inner court, onto its eastern side ...

That is, Ezekiel approaches the east gate from inside the inner court.

To this understanding corresponds the drawing in Block (509), although he translates “into” (528), but then again “to the inner court toward the east” on p. 529.

Many English versions are ambiguous, e.g. NLT: “Then he took me to the east gateway leading to the inner courtyard.”