

Ezekiel’s Temple (Ezek. 40–46): Structures and Measurements

An introduction. Peter Schmidt. 2022.

There are many diagrams and discussions of Ezekiel’s Temple available. The purpose here is

- to introduce translators to the arrangement of the whole complex
- to prepare them for some of the issues they have to decide on
- and to collect the measurements (with verse numbers) for quick reference.

The decoration of the Temple and details like the “ledges”[?] (קִרְיָאֵם) are not discussed here.

Illustrations:

- ❖ For videos, see www.bibliaprints.com. Extremely helpful; some details debatable.
- ❖ For a diagram of the Temple compound, see NICOT, p. 508, fig. 1.
- ❖ For a diagram of the gatehouse, see NICOT, p. 520, fig. 3.
- ❖ For a drawing of the buildings in 3D-perspective, see UBS Realia *Handbook* (Works of Their Hands, 2009), p. 186.
- ❖ For a diagram of the altar, see TOTC, p. 267.

Measurements are given in cubits and in meters. For simplicity, 1 cubit is rounded to 0.5 meter.

FACTS, OR FAIRLY CERTAIN DETAILS	DEBATED ISSUES
<p>• Overall dimensions</p> <p>The complete Temple compound is a square of 500 x 500 cubits (250 x 250 meters) (42:16-20; 45:2). It is surrounded by a wall 6 cubits (3 meters) thick and high (40:5). This forms the outer court.</p> <p>In its center, there is the inner court. It is a square of 100 x 100 cubits (50 x 50 meters) (40:47; 41:14).</p> <p><i>For comparison:</i> a soccer field is about 100 x 70 meters big.¹</p> <p>The terrain has three levels: from outside the compound wall, 7 steps lead up to the outer gatehouses (40:22), another 8 steps lead up to the inner gatehouses (40:31), and another 10 steps lead up to the Temple building (40:49). There are altogether 25 steps to climb.</p> <p><u>Total length (east-west) of the whole Temple compound:</u> <i>Beginning from the eastern gate.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">outer gatehouse (with outer wall) 50 cubits (25 meters)</p> <p>+ space between outer and inner gatehouse 100 cubits (50 meters)</p> <p>+ inner gatehouse 50 cubits (25 meters)</p> <p>+ inner court 100 cubits (50 meters)</p> <p>+ Temple building (with walls) 100 cubits (50 meters)</p>	<p>→ Whether the inner court had a wall is not told.</p> <p>→ We do not know how high each step is.</p>

¹ Even official standards allow for considerable variation.

<p>+ restricted area 20 cubits (10 meters) + western building 80 cubits (40 meters) = 500 cubits (250 meters)</p>	
<p>• 6 gatehouses</p> <p>The eastern, northern and southern outer walls each have one gatehouse, to access the outer court, and opposite each of them is another gatehouse for accessing the inner court.</p> <p>Each gatehouse's length is 50 cubits (25 meters) (40:15; 40:21 etc.).</p> <p><i>For comparison:</i> this is as long as a typical swimming pool lane.</p> <p>The gatehouses' width is 25 cubits (12.5 meters) (40:21ff.).</p> <p>Each gatehouse has three guard chambers on each side of the corridor and one vestibule at its one end (40:7ff.).</p> <p>The outer and inner gatehouses are mirror images of each other. The vestibules of all of them face the outer court.²</p> <p><i>Further details:</i></p> <p>The gatehouse entrance is 10 cubits (5 meters) wide (40:11a). Each guard chamber measures 6 x 6 cubits (3 x 3 meters) (40:7/10/12). They are open toward the corridor. But there is a low wall at the front (גַּבּוּל <i>gabûl</i> "barrier"), 1 cubit (0.5 meter) wide (40:12). – The vestibule's width might be 20 cubits (10 meters).³</p> <p>Where one reads of "jambs", or in other versions of "pillars / pilasters / columns", this translates the Hebrew word אַיִל <i>ayil</i>. It resembles more a short wall than a pillar. It is used (1.) for the dividing walls (partitions) between the guard chambers, and (2.) for the walls on both sides of entrances (the entrances of the gatehouses' vestibules, and in the Temple building).⁴</p> <p><u>Total length of each gatehouse:</u></p> <p>thickness of outside wall (depth of entrance opening) 6 cubits (3 meters) (40:11)</p> <p>+ length of three guard chambers 3 x 6 cubits (3 meters) = 18 cubits (9 meters)</p> <p>+ thickness of two walls between guard chambers 2 x 5 cubits (2.5 meters) (40:7) = 10 cubits (5 meters)</p>	<p>→ The length includes the outside walls.</p> <p>→ The width probably includes the walls as well. But 40:13 could sound like 25 cubits (12.5 meters) is the <i>inside</i> width, without the walls.</p> <p>→ Whether this is the same for the exit at the other end is not stated.</p> <p>40:11b 'length of the gate – 13 cubits (6.5 meters)' is difficult to interpret.</p> <p>40:12 the barrier being "one cubit" (0.5 meter) could also refer to its height, or width and height.</p> <p>40:14 is difficult. The side walls of the vestibule's entrance being 60 cubits (30 meters) high[?] is hard to imagine.⁵</p>

² Block (NICOT, pp. 508f.) understands this the same way, but it is not shown correctly in the diagram.

³ This has to be deduced by calculating. It is the width of the gatehouse, 25 cubits (12.5 meters), minus the outside walls. But their thickness is difficult to determine. Perhaps it is 1.5 cubits (0.75 meters). This issue cannot be discussed here. The measurement 20 cubits (10 meters) is possibly remotely supported by 40:14 LXX, cf. NRSV, Elberfelder version, Taylor (TOTC, 1969).

⁴ The word אַיִל *ayil* occurs 40 times in Ezek. 40–46, beginning with 40:9. It is explained by SDBH as follows: "a relatively short side wall projecting from the main wall of a building, either to create side chambers or to hold a door frame; alternatively this could be a pillar that stands flush with the wall or with the sides of an entrance way; it could also be the verticle part of a door frame – side wall; entrance; jamb".

⁵ In terms of construction, it is not impossible (cf. Keil's comment), but one wonders about the proportions: Ezekiel's Temple is as long and wide as Solomon's Temple (see 1Ki 6:2). Its height is not given, but may be comparable to Solomon's Temple as well, that is 30 cubits (15 meters). If the gatehouses are 60 cubits (30 meters) high, they would be twice as high as the Temple itself.

<p>+ thickness of wall between guard chambers and vestibule 6 cubits (3 meters) (40:7) + length (“depth”) of vestibule 8 cubits (4 meters) (40:9) + thickness of vestibule’s outside wall 2 cubits (1 meter) (40:9) = 50 cubits (25 meters).</p>	
<p>• 30 chambers in the outer court They are probably for worshipers taking sacrificial meals, and perhaps for other practical functions (40:17-18). How large are these chambers? The total length of the outer courtyard is 250 m. From this we have to subtract the width of the gatehouse (12.5 m), and the length of the kitchens in the corners (2 x 20 m), together around 50 m. This leaves roughly 200 m for 8-10 chambers on each side. Thus, every chamber is some 20 meters long. So, it is more like a small hall than a normal room! The width might be half of it (10 m), we do not know. These chambers might have been open toward the courtyard, with the roof only supported by pillars on that side.</p>	<p>○ The chambers might stand <i>on</i> the pavement, or the pavement might only fill the space in front of them. ○ There might be 10 chambers on each of the north, east, and south side, and none in the west. This appears tidy and symmetrical. Or the west side also has some chambers. What could speak for this is 42:8, depending on its interpretation.</p>
<p>• 4 kitchens for the lay people They are located in the four corners of the outer court. They are small courtyards of themselves, each measuring 40 x 30 cubits (20 x 15 meters) (46:21-22). Here, the Levites prepare the people’s share of the peace offerings (46:23-24).</p>	
<p>• Outer court The distance between the exit of each outer gatehouse and the entrance of its opposite inner gatehouse is 100 cubits (50 meters) (40:19).</p>	
<p>• The TEMPLE BUILDING The Temple proper consists of an inner and an outer sanctuary. In front of them is a vestibule. There is an annex with side-rooms, surrounding the Temple on its sides and in its back. The Temple’s overall length is 100 cubits (50 meters) (41:13).* Its width is 50 cubits (25 meters).** The thickness of its outer walls is 6 cubits (3 meters) (41:5). It has three rooms behind each other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the vestibule ○ the outer sanctuary (Holy Place) ○ the inner sanctuary (Most Holy Place) <p><u>Doorways</u> (40:48; 41:1-3) With each of these three Temple rooms, the entrance openings become narrower: 14 – 10 – 6 cubits (7 – 5 – 3 meters).</p>	<p>V. 5 says the outer wall is 6 cubits thick, but v. 7 says the side-rooms became wider with each story, so the wall must be 6 cubits in the 1st story, but thinner in the 2nd/3rd story. Cf. v. 6, which speaks of the wall having supports/ledges/offsets.</p>

Matching this is the broadening of the walls (“jamb”) on each side of the entrances:

3 – 5 – 7 cubits (1.5 – 2.5 – 3.5 meters)

The thickness of these differs as well:

5 – 6 – 2 cubits (2.5 – 3 – 1 meters)

Rooms (40:49; 41:2/4)

All three rooms are 20 cubits (10 meters) wide.

Their length (or “depth”) differs:

vestibule 12 cubits (6 meters)

Holy Place 40 cubits (20 meters)

Most Holy Place 20 cubits (10 meters)

I.e., the Most Holy Place is a square of 20 x 20 cubits (10 x 10 meters), and the Holy Place has the double size of it, 20 x 40 cubits (10 x 20 meters).

• **Annex with side-rooms (storage rooms)**

Around the Temple building is attached a **three-story** annex with 90 side-rooms, **30 rooms in each story** (41:5-6).⁶

The front and back room of the Temple, plus walls, are together 74 cubits (37 meters) long. There are about 11 side-rooms on each side.⁷ That allows for the length of each room to be a bit more than 7 cubits (3 meters). The width is only 4 cubits (2 meters) (41:5). So each room is about 7 x 4 cubits (3.5 x 2 meters) big.

The outer wall of this three-story annex is 5 cubits (2.5 meters) thick (41:9).

Access to the annex is given through **one door on the northern and one door on the southern side** (41:11). These doors open onto a kind of **terrace / platform / ledge** (41:8) that is 6 cubits (**3 meters**) **higher than the yard**, and forms the extension of the foundation of the annex.

The terrace is 5 cubits (2.5 meter) broad (41:11)[?].

* Total length of Temple building:⁸

Beginning at the front. Not counting the terrace in the back.

wall 5 cubits (2.5 meters) + vestibule 12 (6) + wall 6 (3) + Holy Place 40 (20) + wall 2 (1) + Most Holy Place 20 (10) + wall 6 (3) + side-room in the back 4 (2) + wall 5 (2.5) (41:9) = 100 cubits (50 meters).

** Total width:⁹

Not counting the terraces on the sides.

→ vestibule 12 cubits (6 meters): So LXX. According to MT: 11 cubits (5.5 meters).

The annex with its side-rooms is probably attached only to the outer and inner sanctuary, but not the vestibule.

On the width, see also the notes on p. 3.

○ It is not specified how one climbs this 3m-high terrace.

○ Was this platform only the extension of the side-rooms’ foundation, or also the foundation of the Temple proper?

⁶ See Bibliaprints video II 1:00 min. for how they might be distributed along the building.

⁷ As in Bibliaprints video II 1:00 min.

⁸ See Block, p. 541.

⁹ See Zimmerli (BKAT, 1969), p. 1037 etc.

<p>width of Temple room inside 20 cubits (10 meters) + outer walls of Temple proper 2 x 6 cubits (3 meters) = 12 cubits (6 meters) + width of side-rooms inside 2 x 4 cubits (2 meters) = 8 cubits (4 meters) + outer walls of annex 2 x 5 cubits (2.5 meters) = 10 cubits (5 meters) = 50 cubits (25 meters).</p> <p><u>Total width of Temple <i>square</i> (Temple + adjacent space):</u> width of Temple building 50 cubits (25 meters) + breadth of the terrace¹⁰ 2 x 5 cubits (2.5 meters) = 10 cubits (5 meters) + distance between Temple and “other chambers” (41:9-11) 2 x 20 cubits (10 meters) = 40 cubits (20 meters) = 100 cubits (50 meters) (41:14).</p>	<p>According to Block, pp. 551f., the 5-cubit platform (or paved area?) on each side might or might not be included in the 20-cubit open area. But if included, the total would only be 90 cubits (45 meters).</p>
<p>• Restricted Area & Free Space</p> <p>There is some yard space in addition to the central square. In 42:3 [and 4?], it is called part of the “inner court”, but more often it goes by two special names, <i>munnaḥ</i> and <i>gizrâ</i>:</p> <p>○ Restricted area / yard (“cut-off, separated”) גִּזְרָא <i>gizrâ</i> - <i>behind</i> (west of) the Temple building; it is 20 cubits (10 meters) wide (“deep”), and stretches across 100 cubits (50 meters) (41:12-13/15; 42:1/3/10). - as its continuation <i>on the sides</i> of the Temple, strips reach all the way to its front (41:14). They are also 20 cubits (10 meters) wide.</p> <p>○ Free space / open area (“unused, left-over”) מִנְנָח <i>munnaḥ</i> - primarily referring to the above-mentioned strips <i>on the sides</i> of the Temple; they are between the annex with its side-rooms and some other chambers in the court (41:9-10/11a). - secondarily also including the space <i>behind</i> the Temple by the phrase “all around” (41:10). - The mention of <i>munnaḥ</i> in 41:11b is difficult. One possible reading is found in NIV: “and the base adjoining the open area was five cubits wide”. This way, <i>munnaḥ</i> ‘open area’ refers to the same area as before, and מֵאֲדָמָה <i>māqôm</i> is taken as the terrace from v. 8 (“base”).</p>	<p>Translators have to choose between keeping the two names distinct or not. One could also specify: “space in the back / space on the side”.</p> <p>○ The Hebrew word means “cut off,” but it is not clear what is cut off (the space from the people? the west building from the Temple building?).</p> <p>→ So by LXX. MT cryptic. → It is uncertain which other chambers are in view.</p> <p>→ The translation “the breadth of the free space was 5 cubits” would conflict with “20 cubits” in v. 10.</p>
<p>• Hall for washing sacrifices</p> <p>Adjacent to the northern gatehouse to the inner courtyard, there is a room for washing sacrifices (40:38). Its size is not known.</p>	<p>○ The door that is mentioned is either in the front, or it leads into the vestibule. ○ Possibly, the other inner gatehouses, too, have such a</p>

¹⁰ But apparently the terrace at the *back* of the building is not counted in its total *length*, see above.

<p>One could imagine that this hall is on the right side of the northern gatehouse, and the priests' room (next point below) on its left.¹¹ But access to this hall is from the <i>outer</i> court!</p>	<p>hall attached (cf. <i>Handbook</i>). But note Lev. 1:11 (“northward”), and Herod’s Temple.</p>
<p>• 2 rooms next to the inner gatehouses</p> <p>They are for the priests (40:45-46), but they are to be distinguished from the dining rooms and changing rooms (see further below).</p> <p>These two rooms are said to be (40:44):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “outside the gatehouse” (i.e. beside it) – “in the inner court”, but one cannot press the meaning of the preposition בָּ <i>b</i> ‘in’ too much; probably <i>accessible</i> from the inner court – “at the side [כַּתֵּפַת <i>kātēp</i>] of the gatehouse”, so apparently attached to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MT calls them “singers’ rooms”. ○ The exact function is not known; a sacristy?; or for withdrawal for priests on guard duty working in shifts. ○ One is by the northern gatehouse, and one by the southern (so LXX), or by the eastern (so MT; but still facing north).
<p>• The altar</p> <p>The altar stands in the very center of the whole compound (40:47).</p> <p><i>The altar is a huge structure. Described from bottom to top:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a חֵיקָה <i>hēq</i> “gutter / trench”, dug in the ground around the altar. It is 1 cubit (0.5 meters) deep and wide (43:13). • There is a גְּבוּלָה <i>g^bbûl</i> “rim / curb”, which girds that gutter. It is 0.5 cubits (= 1 span) (25 cm) high [or wide?] (43:13). • The base/plinth of the altar is divided into two parts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1.) Its lower part is 2 cubits (1 meter) high (43:14). (2.) Its upper part is 4 cubits (2 meters) high (43:14). • The altar has two ledges (זַרְאָה <i>zārâ</i>). The “lower ledge” is the same as the “smaller ledge”. The “smaller” and the “larger ledge” are both 1 cubit (0.5 meter) wide[?] (43:14). The “larger”, i.e. “upper ledge” has a rim / curb (גְּבוּלָה), which creates a gutter (חֵיקָה) (43:17) – like at the bottom. • (3.) At the top of the altar there is the אֵרֶץ אֵלֶיךָ <i>‘erî’ēl</i> “hearth / fireplace”. It is 4 cubits (2 meters) high (43:15). <p>This results in a total height of 10 cubits (5 meters).¹² There are steps leading up to the altar (43:17).</p> <p>The altar’s length and breadth at different levels is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • altar hearth: 12 x 12 cubits (6 x 6 meters) (43:16) • upper ledge: 14 x 14 cubits (7 x 7 meters) (43:17) • lower ledge: 16 x 16 cubits (8 x 8 meters) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ End of 43:13: MT: “And this is the <u>base</u> [בַּיָּסֵד, <i>literally</i> ‘torso/back’ > mound] of the altar.”¹³ LXX: “And this is the <u>height</u> of the altar.” (Thus introducing v. 14).¹⁴ <p>→ 43:14 NIV is clear: “From the gutter on the ground up to the lower ledge that goes around the altar it is two cubits high, and the ledge is a cubit wide. From this lower ledge to the upper ledge that goes around the altar it is four cubits high, and that ledge is also a cubit wide.”</p> <p>→ Thus, 3 layers: lower base + upper base + hearth. Partly depending on the textual choice (MT), and partly depending on the understanding of חֵיקָה, some show a fourth layer at the very bottom.¹⁵ Some show the lower base starting from the bottom of the gutter.¹⁶</p>

¹¹ See, for instance, in Block, p. 508. Not all diagrams show these rooms.

¹² The altar in Herod’s Temple was 15 cubits (7.5 meters) high [according to Josephus].

¹³ Block: a substructure. Zimmerli (“Sockel” [= plinth]) retains the word in MT, but not its accents, and sees the reference being to v. 14, and puts a colon.

¹⁴ So *Handbook*; RSV.

¹⁵ So Keil (BC, 1868, German ed., appendix), fig. III; Taylor, p. 267; Bible Knowledge Commentary (1985), p. 1308.

¹⁶ So *Handbook*; Allen (WBC, 1990), fig. 5, p. 258. *Handbook* on 43:13: “It is not clear whether the height of this section was measured from the bottom of the gutter or from ground level.”

<p>• The western building בִּנְיָן <i>binyān</i></p> <p>Behind the Temple building, in the west, there is another large building. It is 90 cubits (45 meters) broad and 70 cubits (35 meters) deep (41:12), not including the walls.</p> <p>Looking at it from the Temple building (from the east), this building's breadth is bigger than its depth. That is, its longest sides are the front and the back.</p> <p>The back wall of this building must be identical with the wall of the outer court, because adding up all known dimensions, there is no extra room left behind the building (cf. calculation of total length of whole compound further above).</p> <p><u>Total depth of western building:</u></p> <p>building 70 cubits (35 meters) deep + front & back wall 2 x 5 cubits = 10 cubits (5 meters) + Restricted area 20 cubits (10 meters) = 100 cubits (50 meters) (as in 41:13).¹⁷</p> <p><u>Total breadth of western building:</u></p> <p>90 cubits (45 meters) broad + left & right wall 2 x 5 cubits = 10 cubits (5 meters) = 100 cubits (50 meters)</p>	<p>The function of this building is unknown.</p>
<p>• Dining rooms and changing rooms for the priests (refectories & vestries) (42:1-14)¹⁸</p> <p><i>One set of these stands in the north, another in the south. The northern one is described in detail (42:1-9), the southern one briefly (42:10-12). It would be a mirror image of the northern one. [The first words of v. 10 belong to v. 9 (see Handbook).]</i></p> <p><u>Function</u></p> <p>– for keeping the most holy portions of the sacrifices (42:13) – for eating them there (42:13) – for changing clothes before and after ministering in the holy area (42:14).¹⁹</p> <p>Note that these are distinct from the dining rooms for the lay people (see on the “30 chambers” above).</p> <p><u>Dimensions</u></p> <p>100 x 50 cubits (50 x 25 meters)²⁰ (This is the same as for the Temple building!)</p>	<p>Either they run parallel to the Temple building.²² Or, which seems closer to the text, parallel to the western building and the free space in front of it.²³</p>

¹⁷ Block, nn. 65/66, p. 553; so also Allen.

¹⁸ 42:1 uses the singular of לִשְׂכָּאֵי *liškā*. This has collective sense (‘the chambers-block’). The rest of the chapter always has the plural (‘the chambers’).

¹⁹ Some call them “sacristies”, but I avoid that, because no sacred vessels or liturgical objects are kept in them. One could perhaps apply this term to the two rooms by the gatehouse, see above.

²⁰ The length of 100 cubits (50 meters) matches that of the depth of the western building with its walls + the “restricted area” (cf. above) (Allen, p. 234; Block, p. 564). But are the kitchens (see below) included?

²² As in Bibliaprints video; Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 1303; NIV Study Bible.

²³ As in ISBE, vol. 2, p. 252; *Realia Handbook* (Works of Their Hands), p. 186; Keil; Allen; Block, pp. 508/565; German Common Language Version.

<p>The entrances are facing toward the outer court (north for the northern rooms, south for the southern rooms).²¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage <p>There is a walkway / passage / corridor of 10 cubits (5 meters) width, and 100 cubits (50 meters) length.</p> <p>It is called מַהְלָךְ <i>mah^alāk</i> (42:4) or דֶּרֶךְ <i>derek</i> (42:4 [textual issue]; 42:11-12).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For the northern wing, this walkway could be on the north side to provide access from the outer court to the dining rooms. Or it could be on the south side, making for some space between the dining rooms and the western building. Or it could be a corridor that divides two parts of the dining room building. (This major question affects the various illustrations.) ○ The passage is said to be אֶל־הַפְּנִימִית <i>el-happⁿnîmîṭ</i> ‘to the inner’ (42:4). This could mean it leads into the building, or into the inner court. ○ The word מַהְלָךְ <i>mah^alāk</i> ‘passage’ occurs only once (42:4), but the word דֶּרֶךְ <i>derek</i> ‘way’ occurs here and more often (42:4/11-12 etc.), and it is not always clear what it refers to. ○ Instead of 10 cubits (5 meters), as the majority of English versions has it, MT says 1 cubit (0.5 meters). Some take this as referring to another passage, or interpret it differently.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Kitchens for the priests²⁴ <p>They are located behind the dining rooms, at the far west end (46:19). Here, the priests prepare their share of the offerings (46:20).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We read only of the northern kitchen, but the symmetry suggests a southern counterpart.²⁵ ○ It is not clear how exactly the kitchens for the priests are accessed, and how they connect to the dining rooms.

²¹ 42:2 uses the singular of פֶּתַח, but from v. 4 we know there were several doors (plural of פֶּתַח). See also v. 9 [מְבוֹא ‘entrance’(?)] and vv. 11-12 [מוֹצֵא ‘exit’, פֶּתַח ‘entrance’, both in the plural]. In translation, probably plural is better.

²⁴ In several illustrations, the kitchens are not shown properly. Some that include them are the ones in the Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 1303; German Common Language Version; ISBE 2:252.

²⁵ See Block *ad loc.*