

PART ONE

**THE SCRIPTURAL FRAMEWORK
OF EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE**

DURING JUDAH'S SEVENTY YEAR CAPTIVITY IN Babylon, which was imposed as a divine judgment for their idolatries going back to the time of Solomon's reign, God called Ezekiel to prophesy to His people. After the captives learned of the destruction of their great First Temple back in Jerusalem, Ezekiel received from God a plan of breathtaking complexity for a visionary Temple, the design of which he was to communicate to Israel (see frontispiece at the beginning of this book). The *design, plan, or pattern* of this Temple, with its *exits and entrances*, will be seen to be structured by the covenant promise formula between God and Israel—*"I will be their God, and they shall be My people."* This formula recurs from Genesis to the Prophets (and the New Testament) and precedes the Temple Vision in Ezekiel 37:27 (also on frontispiece). Its two sides express what must happen for a holy, infinite God to dwell (i.e., "tabernacle" or "temple") with sinful, finite man. God must *act* sovereignly, supernaturally, savingly on man's behalf, and man must be *enabled to respond* in faith and obedience. Following are some Bible verses illustrating these dual temple conditions—the last being essentially a prologue to Ezekiel's Temple Vision.

I WILL BE THEIR GOD

THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE

"Pardon our iniquity and our sin,

and take us for Your inheritance."

(Ex. 34:9b)

*"Restore to me the joy of Your
Your salvation, and uphold me
with Your generous Spirit.*

*Then I will teach transgressors Your
ways, and sinners shall be converted
[NJPS: may return] to You."*

(Ps. 51: 12-13) [NJPS: vv. 14-15]

*"Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,
O God, the God of my salvation,*

*and my tongue shall sing aloud
of Your righteousness."*

(Ps. 51:14) [NJPS: v. 16]

Ezekiel's Temple

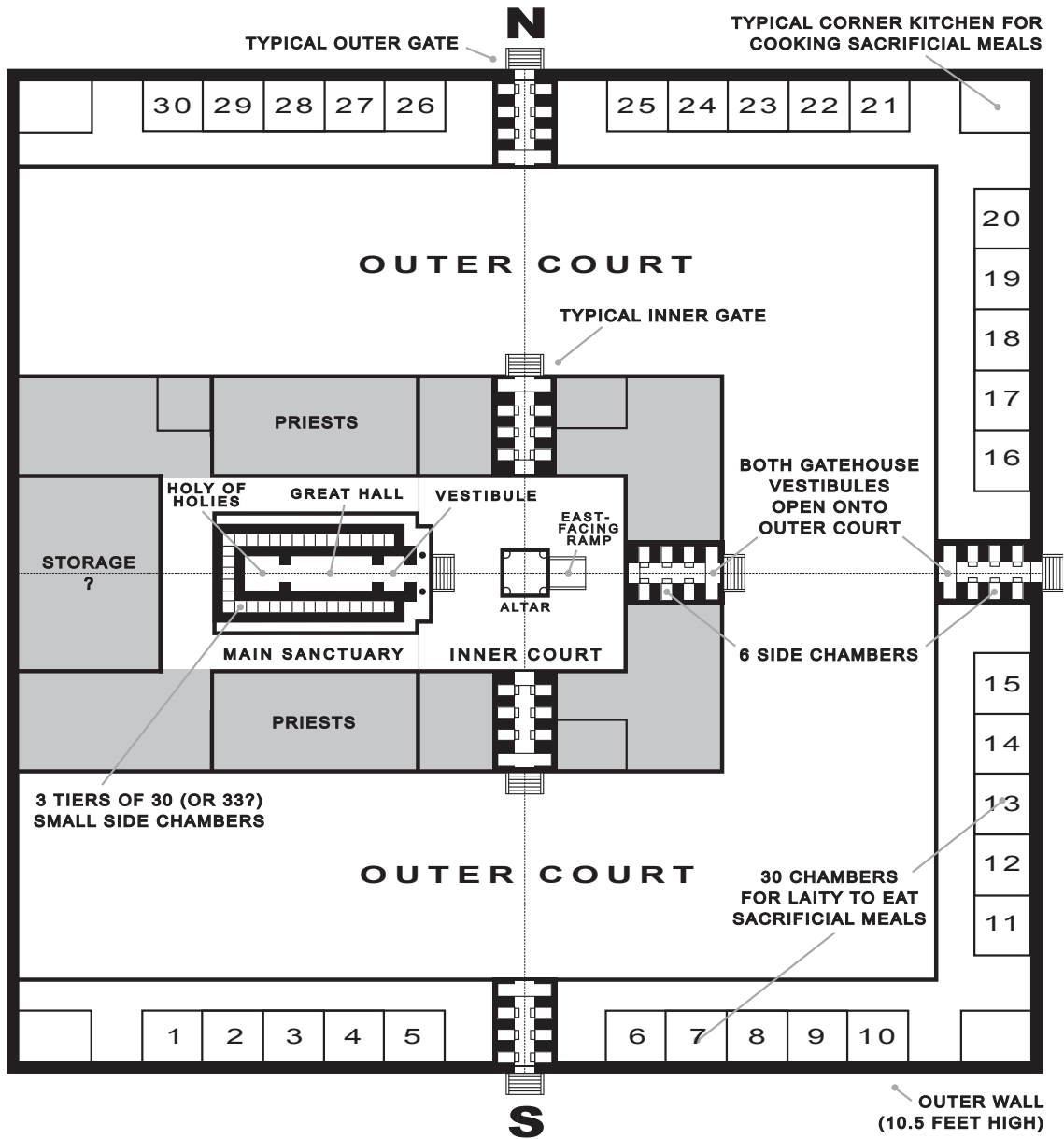


FIGURE 2
THE LAYOUT OF EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE
 (Shading indicates areas not clearly understood as to precise locations of walls and roofed-over areas.)

I WILL BE THEIR GOD

“Blessed is the man whom You choose, and cause to approach You...

“There shall come forth a Rod [NJPS: shoot] from the stem of Jesse...The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him:

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...

THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple.” (Ps. 65:4) [NJPS: v. 5]

...[He] shall stand as a banner [NJPS: standard] to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.” (Isa. 11: 1-2,10)

...and I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.” (Ezek. 36: 25-7)

The overall square form of this Temple and its two crossing spines or axes—both aspects unlike anything in the desert Tabernacle or the permanent Temples—reflect the universality of God’s Kingdom. God told Abraham to look as far as he could in each of the four cardinal directions—north, east, south, and west (Gen. 13:14)—to see the scope of a Promised Land whose ultimate influence was meant for all the world. Ezekiel’s Temple is predicated on the gathering of dispersed Israel from the four corners of the earth (Isa. 11:12, 43:5-6), not for the purpose of hoarding God’s glory, but for spreading it everywhere.

The Temple’s striking system of two intersecting axes will be shown from the Bible to illustrate the two “temple conditions” for God and man to meet. The East-West Axis connecting the Sanctuary and East Outer Gate displays God’s sovereign acts on behalf of His people Israel. The North-South Axis connecting the North and South Outer Gates displays God’s acts in His people to make them His own, distinctive nation for His name in the earth. This is the armature of the “scriptural framework” that gives structure and meaning to Ezekiel’s Temple.

Ezekiel's Temple

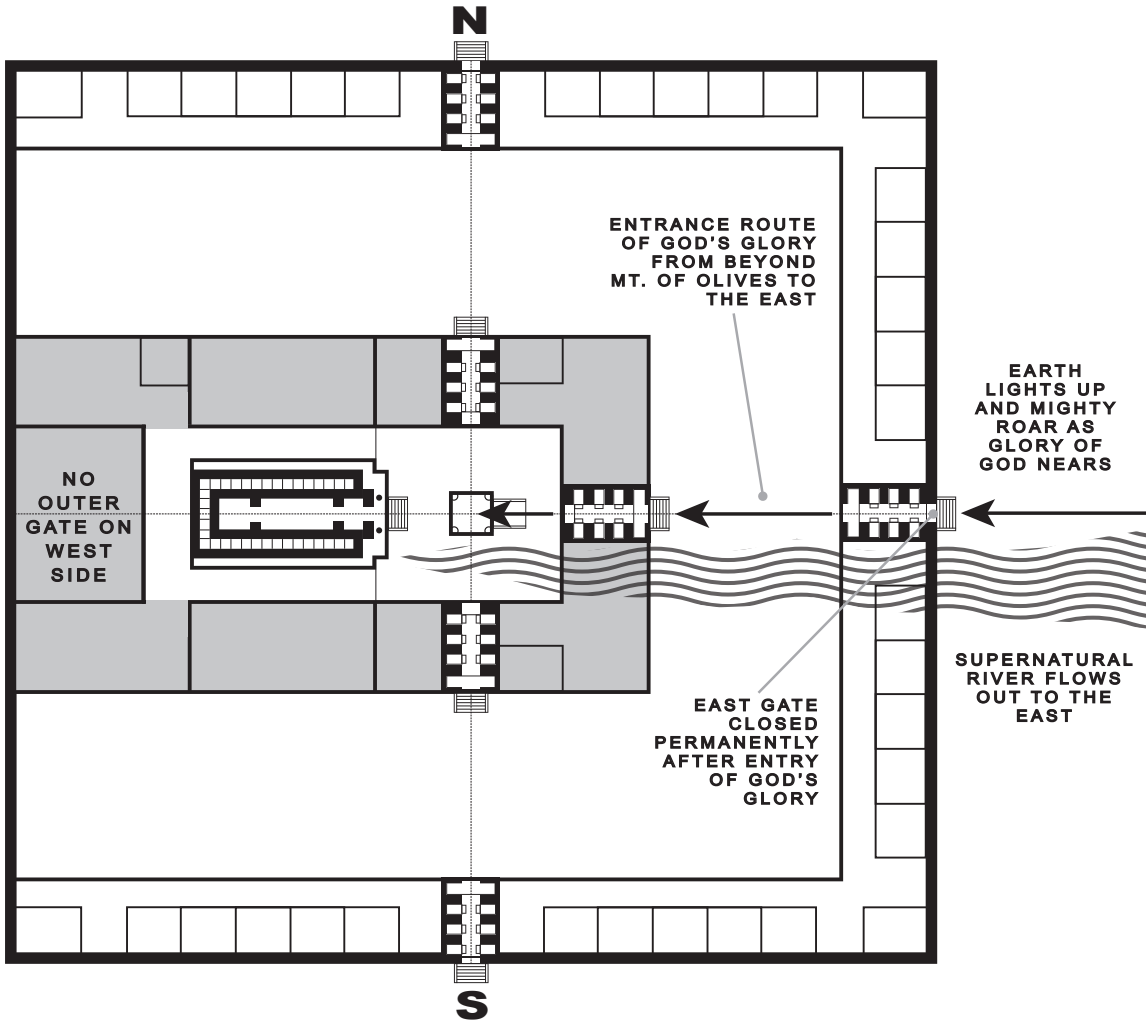


FIGURE 3
THE EAST-WEST AXIS:
God's Sovereign Acts for His People

THE EAST-WEST AXIS: “I WILL BE THEIR GOD”

God’s sovereign acts on behalf of His people

The inner Sanctuary, entered only by the LORD and His faithful line of Zadokite priests, is placed symmetrically about the Temple’s East-West Axis (Fig. 3) on the west side of the Inner Court, with its main entrance on its east end (chapters 40, 41). A straight vista extends from the Sanctuary door across the Inner Court with its altar, through the Outer Court, and out through the East Outer Gate, the main gate of the Temple compound—in Hebrew reckoning, the front is always the east side, facing the sunrise (b. Menahoth 27b.) This gate is to be closed permanently as soon as the “glory” [NJPS: “Presence”] of the LORD has entered the Temple.

God’s glory approaches the Temple from the east (43:4), the direction by which Joshua first led Israel across the Jordan’s dry riverbed in the conquest of the Promised Land. This also reverses the direction of the earlier departure of God’s glory from the First (Solomonic) Temple, which was eastward over the Mount of Olives (11:23). A sound like the roar of mighty waters accompanies God’s westward approach to Ezekiel’s Temple, and the earth *shines with* [NJPS: is “lit up by”] His glory (43:2). The divine Presence proceeds westward on this axis into the Inner Court and fills the whole Temple with the glory of God (43:5).

A miraculous, ever-increasing stream of water issuing from the Sanctuary emerges from the Temple on this E-W axis by the East Outer Gate, and then proceeds to bring life to the barren regions of the eastern desert (47:1-12).

Ezekiel's Temple

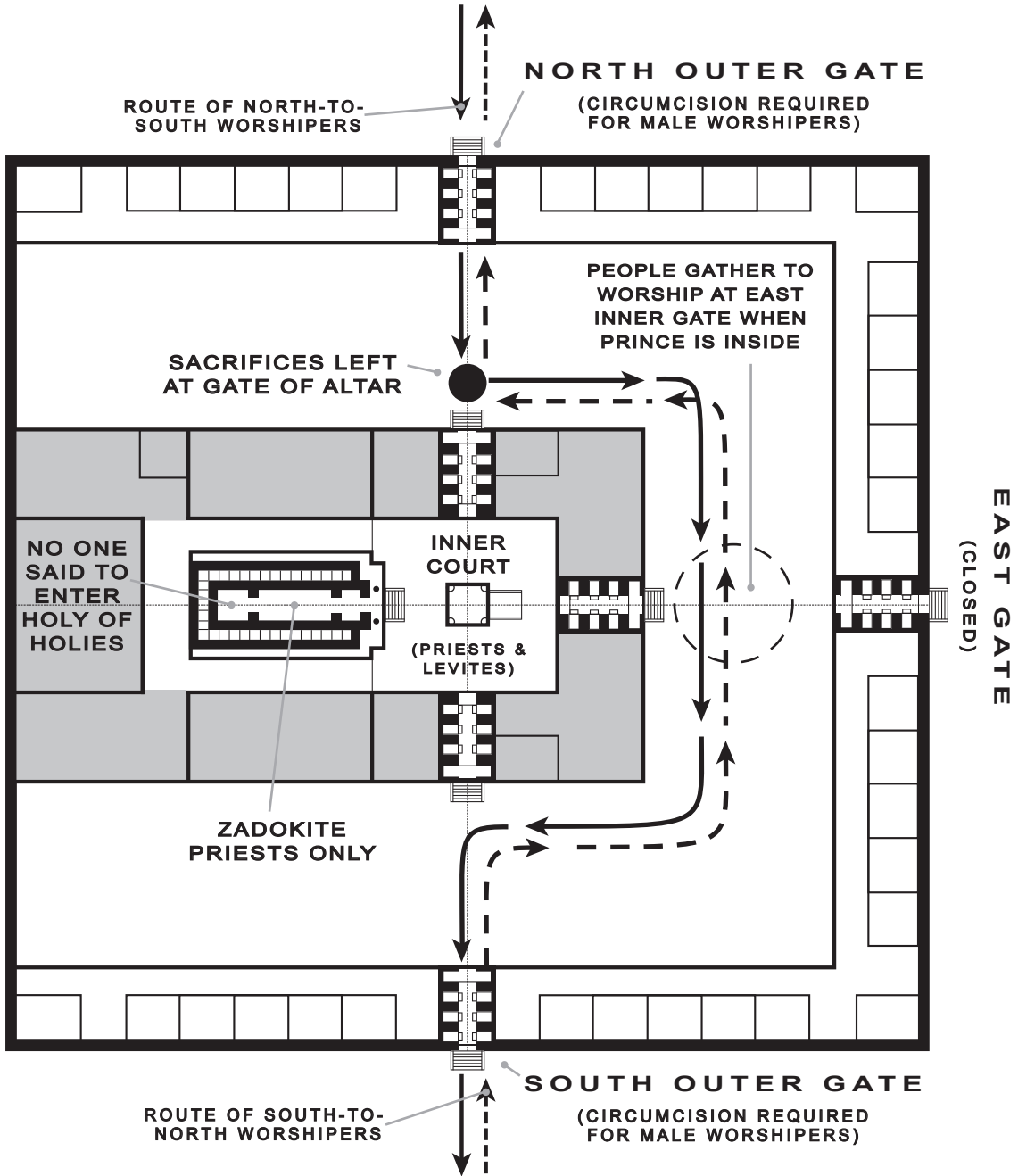


FIGURE 4
THE NORTH-SOUTH AXIS:
The Spirit-enabled response of God's people

THE NORTH-SOUTH AXIS: “THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE”

God’s acts in His people to make them His own

Abraham first comes to Canaan by way of the north, and then the whole people of Israel come up to the Promised Land from Egypt in the south. Later, the Kingdom of David and Solomon splits into north (the “ten tribes”) and south (Judah, with Benjamin) because of the sin of idolatry; Ezekiel’s Temple is predicated on the re-joining of these “two sticks” (37:15-19)—an action that was symbolically performed or “acted out” by Ezekiel in front of the exiles as the last of his many “sign acts” (see Daniel I. Block, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel*, Vol. I, pp. 164ff, Vol. II, p. 393.) The account of his joining those two sticks is coupled with that of the Temple’s covenantal basis (see frontispiece) in one of the Jewish annual readings—the Haftarah to *Va-yigash*.

Circumcised lay worshipers (and a new leader called the Prince) either enter the Temple at the North Outer Gate (Fig. 4) and leave through the South Outer Gate, or the reverse, entering via the South Outer Gate and leaving through the North one (46:9).¹ Lay worshipers must skirt around the Inner Court, which is the exclusive domain of priests and Levites. Worshipers leave their sacrificial offerings (as in Lev. 1:11 and in the First Temple, as explicitly referred to in Ezek. 8:5) outside the North Gate of the Inner Court (40:35ff). When the Prince is in the East Inner Gate (Fig. 4), lay worshipers may gather in the Outer Court adjacent to that gate to join with him in worship (46:3).

Israel’s enemies the Assyrians, Arameans, Chaldeans, and later Gog (Ezek. 38-39) would swarm down to Jerusalem through Hamath and Damascus

1 This inconspicuous verse may seem inadequate to justify the importance given here to the N-S axis until one recalls the emphasis God places on the “*exits and entrances*” (see frontispiece). With the East gate closed, the North and South gates are the *only* functional exits and entrances.