

Envisioning Restoration: Innovations in Ezekiel 40–48

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1.0 Introduction

What is unique about Ezek 40–48 as a vision report? The study of prophetic vision reports as such began in the last century, and scholars created various typologies of these texts based on their form, content, and purpose.¹ Curiously, Ezek 40–48 received only cursory treatment in these studies. Long classified Ezek 40–48 as a “Dramatic Word Vision” along with Amos 7:1–6 and Zech 1:8–17. But Horst regarded Ezek 40–48 as a “pure literary vision” distinct from other vision reports, and Niditch did not treat it at all.²

The works of these scholars remain valuable. However, because of the constraints inevitably created by their typologies, certain distinctive content features in Ezek 40–48 did not receive attention. In this essay, I want to examine the use of four content-related features that set Ezek 40–48 apart from other vision reports: the interpreter/guide figure, cosmic-mythic imagery, description of sacred space, and legal material. By so doing, I hope to more effectively situate Ezek 40–48 in the development of ancient Israelite and Second Temple-period Jewish visionary literature.

2.0 Content and Composition³

¹ M. Sister, “Die Typen der prophetischen Visionen in der Bibel,” *MGWJ* 78 (1934): 399–430; Friedrich Horst, “Die Visionsschilderungen der alttestamentlichen Propheten,” *EvTh* 20 (1960): 193–205; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. P. R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 53–55; Burke O. Long, “Reports of Visions among the Prophets,” *JBL* 95.3 (1976): 353–65; S. Amsler, “La parole visionnaire des prophètes,” *VT* 31.3 (1981): 359–62; Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (HSM 30; Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1983).

² Long, “Reports of Visions,” 359–63; his other categories are “Oracle Vision” (357–59; here he includes e.g. Amos 7:7–8; Jer 1:11–14; 24:1–10) and “Revelatory-Mysteries Vision” (363–64; here he includes e.g. Ezek 37; Zech 2:3–4). Horst’s three categories of classification were “Anwesenheitsvision,” “Wortsymbolvision,” and “Geschehnisvision,” but of Ezek 40–48 he said “Gewiß gibt es auch . . . reine literarische Visionen, wie der als Vision stilisierte Komplex Hes 40–48 (eigentlicher Visionsstil liegt freilich hier nur für einen schmalen Textbereich vor);” (“Visionsschilderungen,” 202, 205). Niditch (who uses Sister’s schema) did not treat any of Ezekiel’s visions because in her analysis they lack a symbolic element and do not display the “seeing-question-answer” format present in other visions; see Niditch, *Symbolic Visions*, 2, 9–12.

³ For an excellent short introduction to the contents of and critical issues associated with Ezek 40–48, see Paul Joyce, “Temple and Worship in Ezekiel 40–48,” in *Temple and Worship in*

The contents of the vision report in Ezek 40–48 can be summarized as follows: Ezekiel the prophet is depicted as having a visionary experience in which he is taken to “a very high mountain” in the land of Israel. A “man whose appearance was like bronze” tells him to report what he sees, then leads him around a temple complex and shows him its features (Ezek 40–42). The prophet next sees the Glory of Yhwh entering the sanctuary and hears Yhwh’s claim that he will reside there “among the people of Israel forever” (Ezek 43:1–9). He is told to “declare the temple to the house of Israel” (43:10). He then receives the “law of the temple” (40:12), including instructions for the altar and its dedication (43:13ff), for the cult personnel and access to the sanctuary (44:1ff), for the division of land around the sanctuary (45:1–8), and for sacred festivals and offerings (45:9–46:24). He sees a river flowing out of the temple, bringing supernatural fertility and health (47:1–12), then is given further instructions for tribal land allotments (47:13–48:29) and for the layout of the city gates (48:30ff).

The arrangement and diversity of content indicate that Ezek 40–48 is a composite text.⁴ It contains tensions that most feel are best accounted for by a model of sequential editorial activity (e.g., Ezek 40:45–46 with its “some priests for temple, other priests for altar” scheme stands in tension with Ezek 44:13, where the Levites, whose job it is to minister in the temple, are explicitly prohibited from “functioning as priests”).⁵ The most recent studies of the compositional history of Ezek 40–48 argue for a core of Ezekielian material with later redactional layers.⁶ If this is correct, what is the rationale for including Ezek 40–48 in entirety in one’s analysis of a vision report?

Of course, opinions concerning what is secondary in these chapters differ considerably.⁷ Moreover, it is certainly possible that those in the scribal circles who copied and added to earlier

Biblical Israel. Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar (LHBOTS 422; ed. John Day; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 145–63.

⁴ See S. Talmon and M. Fishbane, “The Structuring of Biblical Books: Studies in the Book of Ezekiel,” *ASTI* 10 (1976), 127, 138–40; Moshe Greenberg, “The Design and Themes of Ezekiel’s Program of Restoration,” *Int* 38 (1984), 184–89.

⁵ Cf. H. Gese, *Der Verfassungsentwurf des Ezechiel (Kap. 40–48) traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht* (BHT 25; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), 66; Jon Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48* (HSM 10; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 129–32, 153 n. 13; Steven Tuell, *The Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 40–48* (HSM 49; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 3, 31–33; Joyce, “Temple and Worship,” 146. However, others believe Ezek 40–48 in entirety should be understood as the product of the prophet; cf. Menahem Haran, “The Law Code of Ezekiel XL–XLVIII and its Relation to the Priestly School,” *HUCA* 50 (1979), 46–47; Greenberg, “Design,” 181.

⁶ Thilo Rudnig, *Heilig und Profan: Redaktionskritische Studien zu Ez 40–48* (BZAW 287; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000); Michael Konkel, *Architektonik des Heiligen. Studien zur zweiten tempelvision Ezechiels (Ez 40–48)* (BBB 129; Berlin: Philo, 2001).

⁷ For example, while Gese (*Verfassungsentwurf*, 36, 109, 114) understands Ezek 43:1ff as a redactional layer subsequent to the original Ezekielian vision, Konkel and Zimmerli place 43:1–10 with the original temple vision; see Konkel, *Architektonik*, 239–40; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2* (trans. James D. Martin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 412.

vision reports would be motivated by the same kind of experiences as the initial visionary. More to the point is the fact that even if some material in Ezek 40–48 is redactional, it is redactionally presented as an integral part of the vision report: the “man” of Ezek 40:1–4 continues to guide the prophet and provide explanation throughout these chapters. With respect to issues of dating, the command to “declare the temple” in Ezek 43:10 suggests to me that the material in Ezek 40–42 is best understood in a context when there was no temple (pre-515 BCE), and the concerns of Ezek 40–48 suggest to me that the bulk of the material is exilic. While Persian-period additions are not unlikely, the lack of historical references in the material makes attempts at more specific dating uncertain.⁸

3.0 Ezekiel 40–48 as a Vision Report

Ezekiel 40–48 displays the formal features shared by other texts that allow us to classify the vision report as a literary genre.⁹ These chapters are explicitly introduced as a “vision” (מְרֹאָה / מְרָאָה, Ezek 40:2; cf. 43:3),¹⁰ and contain references linking the experience to earlier visions (Ezek 43:3a > ch. 9; 43:3b > ch. 1). They use terminology such as “I saw” (Ezek 41:8; 43:3; 44:3), “show/be shown” (Ezek 40:4), and “see with your eyes” (Ezek 40:4; 44:5).¹¹ After the introduction, the text continues with a first person report of what the prophet saw and heard.

Visionary literature in the Jewish and Christian traditions presents us with a problem: on the one hand, it purports to describe humans who, in an altered state of consciousness, experience things that are not normally experienced—sights of the deity and the heavenly realm, scenes of past or future events, encounters with heavenly beings, and travel to other (even cosmic) locations. On the other hand, these texts are marked by creative and deliberately planned literary features (e.g., literary artistry, structure and patterning, quotation or allusion, exegesis, reflective commentary) that cannot be accounted for as products of altered consciousness.¹² Current research attempts to account for both the experiential and the literary aspects of these texts.¹³ While it is true that

⁸ Cf. Joyce, “Temple and Worship,” 146–47.

⁹ For a definition of the genre and its features, see Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets Part 2* (FOTL 22; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 644–45.

¹⁰ Cf. Ezek 1:1; 8:3, 4; 11:24; cf. Dan 8:16, 27. In later visionary literature we find the use of the terms חֲזוֹן (Dan 7:1, 2, 7, 13, 15, 20) and חֲזוֹן (Dan 8:1, 2, 15, 17, 26).

¹¹ Note Amsler’s distinction (“La parole visionnaire,” 362) between the *literary genre* “vision report” and other prophetic utterances which contain references to “seeing” (e.g. Isa 21:2, 7; Jer 4:21, 23ff). For the use of “sight” terminology in other prophetic vision reports, see Isa 6:1; Jer 1:11–13; 24:1, 3; 38:21; Ezek 1:4, 28; 8:2, 4, 6; 11:24; etc.; Amos 7:1, 4, 7, 8; 8:1, 2; 9:1; Zech 1:8; 2:1, 3, 5; 3:1; 4:2; 5:1, 2, 5, 9; 6:1. In later visionary literature, see Dan 7:2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 21; 8:2–7, 15; 4Q213a 1.ii.15–16; 4Q554 2.ii.15; 11Q18 20.1–7; Rev 21:10.

¹² E.g., Ezek 11:1ff (cf. 8:1–3) and Rev 1:1, 9–11 contain claims to visionary experience, but Ezek 11 shows the influence of the Holiness Code (Ezek 11:8 // Lev 26:25; Ezek 11:12, 20 // Lev 18:4; Ezek 11:16 // Lev 26:33), and Rev 4:1–8 is clearly dependent on Ezek 1.

¹³ With respect to Ezekiel in particular, see Paul Joyce, “Ezekiel 40–42: The Earliest ‘Heavenly Ascent’ Narrative?” in *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence* (ed. Henk Jan de Jonge and Johannes Tromp; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 34–36; Susan Niditch, “Ezekiel 40–48 in Visionary

descriptions of visionary experience can be fictional—and we may not be able to distinguish between fictional and non-fictional accounts—there is no reason why experiential realities and literary features cannot be integral aspects of the same text. Moreover, all experience, religious and otherwise, is culturally shaped. Given the status of sacred texts in Judaism and Christianity, it is unsurprising to find the influence of these texts on both visionary experience and textual accounts of experience. In short, the literary features of Ezek 40–48 do not provide grounds to deny that Ezekiel had a visionary experience.

3.1 The Interpreter/Guide Figure

In Ezekiel’s vision, the prophet is met by a guide described as “a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze” (Ezek 40:3).¹⁴ As he leads Ezekiel on a tour of the temple precincts, this entity measures the structures (Ezek 40–42; 44:1, 4; 46:19; 47:1ff) with a line and rod and provides Ezekiel with explanations (Ezek 40:4; 41:4, 22; 42:13–14; 46:20, 24; 47:6, 8–12). What are the unique features of this interpreter/guide figure with respect to depictions in other vision reports?

First, the “measuring” motif only occurs in Ezek 40–48 and later visionary literature.¹⁵ While its appearance in Zech 2:5–6 presumes the need for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (cf. Zech 1:16; 2:7–

Context,” *CBQ* 48 (1986): 208–24; Margaret S. Odell, “Ezekiel Saw What He Said He Saw: Genres, Forms, and the Vision of Ezekiel 1,” in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 162–76; David L. Petersen, “The Basic Forms of Prophetic Literature” (in idem), 272. For the larger discussion of how the literary and the experiential are related, see Philip S. Alexander, *The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 93–96; James Davila, “Ritual Praxis in Ancient Jewish and Christian Mysticism” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. San Francisco, Ca., Nov 20, 2011); Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii, 95–114; Dan Merkur, “Cultivating Visions Through Exegetical Meditations,” in *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Elijor* (ed. Daphna V. Arbel and Andrei A. Orlov; New York: de Gruyter, 2011), 62–91; Christopher Rowland, with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka, “Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity,” in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (ed. April D. De Conick; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 41–56; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 158–77; Michael E. Stone, “Visions and Pseudepigraphy,” in *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 90–121.

¹⁴ For a similar description, see Dan 10:6 where the angelic figure has “arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze” (בעין נהשת קלל); this phrase is probably taken from the description of the heavenly beings in Ezek 1:7).

¹⁵ For other occurrences of an angelic being with a measuring line/rod in visionary literature, see Zech 2:5–8; the Aramaic “New Jerusalem” texts (e.g. 4Q554 2.ii.9; 2.iii.18); 1 Enoch 61:1–5; 70:3–4; and Rev 11:1–2; 21:15–17.

10), the temple which is measured in Ezek 40–42 is already complete.¹⁶ Here the measuring serves to highlight the nature of sacred space. The function of the measuring in Ezek 47 is to symbolically indicate the extent of supernatural restoration by marking the increase of life-giving waters.¹⁷

Second, in earlier vision reports, the interpreter/guide is Yhwh himself (Jer 1; 24; Ezek 8–11; Amos 7–9).¹⁸ In Ezek 40–48 and in later visionary literature, the interpreter/guide is an angelic entity.¹⁹

Third, the interpreter/guide may give a tour (Ezek 8; 40–48), ask the question “[What] do you see?” followed by commentary (e.g. Jer 1:11, 13; 24:3; Ezek 8:6; 47:6; Amos 7:8; 8:2),²⁰ answer the questions of the visionary (e.g. Zech 1:9; cf. Dan 7:16ff), or provide information without

¹⁶ The motif in Zechariah is given an ironic twist: no measuring in fact occurs! The “man with a measuring line” is told that Jerusalem will have no need for walls, because it will be protected by God himself (Zech 2:7–10).

¹⁷ It is unclear what is being measured (people? virtues?) in 1 Enoch 61:1–5. In 1 Enoch 70:3–4, a portion for Enoch is measured. The function of the measuring in Rev 11:1–2 (performed by the visionary!) is to symbolize distinction: the “temple of God and the altar” are measured, but “the court which is outside” is not. This highlights the difference between those who are sacred (v. 1, “those who worship in it”) and profane (the court “has been given to the nations,” who will “trample” [cf. Dan 8:13–14] the holy city for “forty-two months” [cf. Dan 7:25; 12:7]). The measuring of the heavenly city by the angelic guide in Rev 21:15ff depends on Ezek 40–48, and envisions a restoration in which God dwells with his people (Rev 21:3; cf. Ezek 43:7, though the passage uses the locutions of Ezek 37:27).

¹⁸ There is no interpreter/guide figure in Isa 6 (though Isaiah’s question about the timeframe in v. 11 is answered by Yhwh), Jer 38, or Ezek 1. What the prophets see needs no explanation.

¹⁹ The heavenly guide/interpreter may be described as a מלאך (Zech 1:9, 14 and throughout) or as an entity with a human appearance (איש Ezek 40:3–5; 43:6; 47:3; Zech 1:8, 10; 2:5; Dan 9:21; 10:5; 12:6–7; see also מראה גבר Dan 8:15; קול אדם Dan 8:16; כדמות בני אדם Dan 10:16; מראה אדם Dan 10:18). However, the figures in Ezek 40–48 and Daniel are more than simply human: in Ezekiel, the angelic guide has the “appearance of bronze” (Ezek 40:3), and in Daniel, the guide inspires supernatural terror (Dan 8:17–18; 10:7–10, 15–17) and is described as radiant (Dan 10:5–6). The vision described in the Aramaic Levi material mentions an angel (4Q213a 1.ii.18), though the text is lacking after this line. The Aramaic “New Jerusalem” texts may refer to a guide in 4Q554 2.ii.12, but identification is lacking. In Rev 7:13ff, John receives explanation from one of the heavenly elders; in Rev 10:4, 8, from an unidentified heavenly voice; in Rev 17:1ff, 21:9ff from an angel (cf. 22:8–9). Initially, however, he is addressed by a figure described as the heavenly “one like a son of man” (Rev 1:9–20; 4:1ff; cf. Dan 7:9–14; 10:5–6).

²⁰ In later texts, the question can be “Do you understand?” (Zech 4:5, 13; Dan 10:20).

being prompted by a question (e.g. Ezek 40:45–46; 41:22; cf. Dan 9:21–22).²¹ Only in Ezekiel and later visionary literature is the tour motif present.²²

The obvious question is: if in earlier vision reports (and even in Ezek 8:1–3, 5ff!) the figure who guides/shows and explains sights to the visionary is Yhwh himself, why the innovation in Ezek 40–48, in which the interpreter/guide figure is now an angelic being? Kasher has offered a plausible explanation: a central argument of Ezek 40–48 is that Yhwh’s permanent residence is properly in the earthly temple, not in the heavenly realm.²³ The temple is “the place of [Yhwh’s] throne and the soles of [his] feet forever” where he will “dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel forever” (Ezek 43:7, 9). Ezekiel sees the Glory enter the temple through the east gate (43:4–5), which is then permanently shut (44:1–2). It would therefore be improper for Yhwh to function as the interpreter/guide figure, as he did in Ezekiel’s earlier visions (8:2–3a, 4ff). A third party—the “man whose appearance was like bronze”—is needed to carry out this function.²⁴

3.2 Cosmic-Mythic Imagery

In Ezekiel’s vision, he sees a “very high mountain” (Ezek 40:2) on which are located a temple compound and (to the south) a city (40:2, 5ff; 48:8–20; cf. 43:12). Flowing out of the temple is a river whose flow is ever-increasing and whose waters turn the Dead Sea into a freshwater lake, pure enough to support vast numbers and species of fish (47:1–10). On the banks of this life-giving river are trees that bear fruit constantly, providing food and healing (47:12).

Behind these three images—the very high mountain, the river of life, the tree of life—are ancient concepts found throughout the Near East. The cosmic mountain was the dwelling-place of the gods, from whence they ruled and established order in the universe.²⁵ Likewise, the cosmic river—a source of life—was associated with the residence of the deity.²⁶ The tree as an emblem

²¹ In Zech 4:2 the angel asks “What do you see?”, but only gives the interpretation of what is seen after the prophet asks (4:4ff); in Zech 5:1–2 the angel asks the same question, but provides the interpretation (5:3ff) without being asked by the prophet.

²² In Ezekiel, motion is predicated of the visionary as well as the guide (cf. “he brought me” in Ezek 8:7, 14, 16; 40:17 etc.); in Zechariah, it seems as if the movements of the guide figure take place before a stationary visionary (cf. Zech 2:1–4; 4:1–2; 5:5; and note how the scenes are typically introduced with “I lifted my eyes,” Zech 2:1, 5; 5:1, 5, 9; 6:1). The tour motif occurs very prominently in 1 Enoch (cf. 1:2; 17:1ff). Rev 21:9ff presumes a tour, but lacks any reference to motion.

²³ Rimmon Kasher, “Anthropomorphism, Holiness and Cult,” *ZAW* 110 (1998), 194–98.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 202: “if God Himself were to accompany the prophet on his tour of the stream, this would signify that God had left His Temple—and this the prophet wishes to avoid.”

²⁵ In Ugaritic literature, El (CAT 1.1.III.12), Baal (CAT 1.3.I.20–22; 1.3.III.30–31), and the divine assembly (CAT 1.2.I.19–20) all exercise their rule from mountains. See Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

²⁶ In Ugaritic literature, El’s dwelling is “at the source of the two rivers, the meeting of the two deeps” (CAT 1.2.III.4).

of life and fertility was also common in ancient Near Eastern iconography. Israel appropriated and transformed these cosmic-mythic images, adapting them to argue that Yhwh was the source of life and order, and that Sinai and Zion were loci of stability and protection.²⁷ But these three images are not present in other prophetic vision reports.²⁸ Moreover, the presence of any kind of mythic imagery is rare in prophetic vision reports.²⁹ Ezekiel seems to be the innovator here.

What is even more remarkable is the situation in which Ezekiel uses this cosmic-mythic imagery. Other Israelite authors used these images to celebrate the realities of Zion and temple, where Yhwh dwelt with his people. Ezekiel had the audacity to use symbols of stability, life, and healing when the city and temple were in ruins. As Levenson has argued, Ezek 40:2 picks up the promise of restoration on the “high and lofty mountain” from Ezek 17:22–24 (cf. 20:40; 34:14). The reconstitution of the temple in Zion is thus depicted as the end result of the return from exile.³⁰ Why would Ezekiel use these mythic images? According to Levenson, he is attempting to convince the exiles of a reality deeper than that which they can currently see: “What [Ezekiel] sees is the security of Zion, whose historical end he saw and narrated in chs. 8–11, but whose supra-historical foundation can never be razed.”³¹ But Ezekiel also innovates by merging Zion

²⁷ For cosmic mountain imagery, see Exod 15:7; Isa 2:2; 14:13–14; Ezek 28:14, 16; Zech 14:10; Ps 48:2–3. It is no accidental detail that Yhwh gives law from a mountain (Exod 19–20; 24:12; Deut 34:2–4). For the river of life, see Gen 2:10; Joel 4:18; Zech 14:8; Ps 46:5; cf. 1QH 14.16; 16.4–14. For the tree of life, see Gen 2:9; Prov 11:30; cf. 1QH 16.4–14. For the hope of a transformed earth “like Eden,” see 4Q475 1.5.

²⁸ This imagery can be found in later visionary literature, some of which is directly dependent on Ezek 40–48. For the cosmic mountain, see Test. Levi 2:5–6 (cf. 4Q213a 1.ii.14–18); 1 Enoch 17:2 (but see also 1 Enoch 18:6, 18); Rev 21:10ff. For the river of life, see 11Q18 10.i.1(?; the text is fragmentary); 1 Enoch 17:4(?); 26:2; Rev 22:1–2. For the tree(s) of life, see 1 Enoch 24:4–25:6; Rev 2:7; 22:2.

²⁹ One uncontested example is the reference to “the Great Deep” in the vision reports of Amos (Amos 7:4). While some have identified the reference to the disaster “from the north” in Jer 1:14 as mythic, Holladay argues that references to “the north” in Jeremiah are literal and have human referents; see the discussion in William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 43. Susan Niditch claims that the divine warrior and divine council myths are present in Zechariah's vision reports (*Symbolic Vision*, 11, 172–74). But the image of the “wall of fire . . . and glory” in Zech 2:9 is defensive, not offensive; and judging from its similarity to Isa 4:5–6 (reflecting the traditions in Exod 13:21; 14:19–20), it seems more likely to me that the provenance of this image is to be found in an Israelite background. Moreover, the description of the heavenly temple and angelic figures in Zechariah do not reflect the appropriation of old Canaanite mythic imagery (as in e.g. Ps 82:1; 89:6–8). Petersen likewise critiques Halpern's claim that mythic patterns underlie Zechariah's visions; see Baruch Halpern, “The Ritual Background of Zechariah's Temple Song,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 167–90; David L. Petersen, “Zechariah's Visions: A Theological Perspective,” *VT* 34.2 (1984): 195–206. In later literature, the situation is different; many see the Canaanite “conflict with the sea” myth behind the imagery in Daniel 7:3 (cf. Rev 13:1–2; 21:1). See John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1985), 157.

³⁰ Levenson, *Program of Restoration*, 7–8; cf. the larger discussion, 7–53

³¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

imagery with Eden imagery (via the trees and river of life symbolism)—a bold attempt to reform political reality by means of a “pre-political” ideal.³²

3.3 Describing the Layout of Sacred Space

In Ezek 40–42 the prophet describes in great detail a vision of a temple complex, and in ch. 43 a vision of the Glory of Yhwh entering the sanctuary. No other prophetic vision report provides such a description.³³ It is true that later visionary literature contains architectural descriptions of sacred space, but Ezekiel is clearly the innovator here.³⁴ What is he accomplishing by recounting this vision?

Could Ezek 40–42 be a building proposal?³⁵ This is unlikely, given the lack of practical information and indeed of any command to build.³⁶ The focus is on boundaries (hence the lack of vertical dimensions), not on building.³⁷ The vision of a completed temple provides hope by speaking to the certainty of God’s presence with his people and to the restoration of holiness and purity, the absence of which was described so pointedly earlier in the book.³⁸ These chapters

³² Ibid., 33.

³³ Ezek 8–9 contains a tour of the temple where location is important to what is happening, but no measurements are made, and the nature of sacred space and its arrangement is not the central issue. And with respect to the vision of the return of the Glory in Ezek 43, we would not expect earlier vision reports to contain content such as this. In the later visionary text of Rev 21 we see a return of God, but the scope of this vision is global (cf. the universalization of Ezek 47:12b in Rev 22:2).

³⁴ In 4Q554, 11Q18, and related texts (the Aramaic “New Jerusalem” material), the visionary is shown the layout and dimensions of a city with a temple. In Rev 21, John has a vision of the New Jerusalem and is shown its walls, dimensions, and gates. In 4 Ezra 10:25–27, Ezra has a vision of a woman in mourning who suddenly becomes a city with an enormous foundation; this woman is identified by an angelic interpreter as the restored Zion (10:40–44), the glory of which is emphasized (10:50, 53).

³⁵ V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (JSOTSup 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 138: “An explicit and detailed command to build a temple at some unspecified date in the future concludes the book of Ezekiel (chs. 40–48).”

³⁶ Cf. Steven Tuell, “Ezekiel 40–2 as Verbal Icon,” *CBQ* 58.4 (1996), 650–63; Kalinda Rose Stevenson, *The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40–48* (Atlanta: SBL, 1996), 18–24, 151; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 510–11, 597. Unlike Joyce (“Heavenly Ascent,” 27), I do not take Ezek 43:11 as a “command to build.”

³⁷ Stevenson (*Territorial Rhetoric*, 116–17) argues that the vision of a completed temple with no reference to a human king—the traditional sponsor of temple construction—is a political critique designed to reinforce the kingship of Yhwh.

³⁸ See Greenberg, “Design,” 181–83, 206 (who notes how the vision functions as an answer to problems raised earlier in the book) and Stevenson, *Territorial Rhetoric*, 40–43 (who highlights the function of the altar in restoration).

explicitly mention the function of the boundaries, zones, and access instructions: to ensure holiness (Ezek 41:4; 42:13–14, 20; 43:12)³⁹ and to inculcate shame in the people by reminding them of their past inability to maintain purity and holiness (Ezek 43:10).⁴⁰ They are part of a thoroughgoing attempt to restructure the society of Israel.⁴¹

Beyond this, scholars have explored the possibility of additional functions for these chapters: are they a vision of a heavenly ascent, the account of which functions as a “verbal icon” to assure the people of access to God’s presence?⁴² An eschatological vision?⁴³ An expression of the prophet’s anthropomorphic conception of God?⁴⁴ An attempt to eliminate anthropomorphisms from the conception of God?⁴⁵ The diversity of proposals is due in part to the richness and complexity of the material.

3.4 Legal Material

In Ezek 43–48 we see a great deal of legal material, much of which is paralleled in Pentateuchal texts. No other prophetic vision report contains priestly legal material, although later visionary literature does.⁴⁶ Once again, Ezekiel is the innovator. Yet there is considerable disagreement as to the function of this material.

For some, the legal material in Ezek 40–48 is practical law to be carried out;⁴⁷ for others, it is ideal or utopian.⁴⁸ Of course, these need not be mutually exclusive options. For example, while

³⁹ For the specifics of how the temple complex layout maintains sanctity, see Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 37–48; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 544, 564–68, 571–74.

⁴⁰ Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Ultimate Aim of Israel’s Restoration in Ezekiel,” in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Chaim Cohen et al.; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 313–14; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 511, 589.

⁴¹ Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 3, 151–53, 160.

⁴² Tuell, “Verbal Icon,” 656–59, 662–64; Joyce, “Heavenly Ascent,” 17–41. Joyce (p. 27) takes issue with Tuell’s argument that in Ezek 43:7a the Glory is “entering the visionary temple” (“Verbal Icon,” 656). For Joyce, the temple of ch. 43 is the earthly temple (visualized as rebuilt) which is patterned after the heavenly temple described in chs. 40–42 (“Heavenly Ascent,” 27, 29).

⁴³ Levenson, *Program of Restoration*, 44–46, 48 (though this does not for Levenson rule out human involvement).

⁴⁴ Kasher, “Anthropomorphism,” 192–96.

⁴⁵ J. Milgrom, “The Unique Features of Ezekiel’s Sanctuary,” in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay* (ed. Nili Sacher Fox; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 302ff.

⁴⁶ Cf. the Aramaic “New Jerusalem” texts (e.g. 2Q24; 4Q554; 11Q18); the “Visions of Amram” (4Q543–547; these are fragmentary, but see 4Q545 3.1–6; 4Q547 2.1–3; 4.3–8); the “Aramaic Levi” texts (4Q213a; 4Q213b; 4Q214; 4Q214b).

⁴⁷ Cf. G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 425; Konkel, *Architektonik*, 350.

the Temple Scroll (11Q19) contains some laws that could actually be practiced, others seem to be impractical if not impossible.⁴⁹ But the difficulty remains: did the prophet expect any part of the vision to be implemented, and if so, which parts?⁵⁰

Likewise, some feel that the priestly legal material of Ezek 40–48 represents actual legislation practiced in the Persian period. For example, Tuell believes that it “describes . . . actual institutions,” that it was a “law code” whose composition was prompted by Persian collections of provincial legal material.⁵¹ In my judgment, we know too little about the conditions associated with the priesthood during the Persian period to confidently identify this as practiced legislation. The alternative—which seems more likely to me—is that the legal material is selective, a corrective to past abuses. It is not extensive enough to function as a “code” regulating the totality of priestly practice. While it looks to the future, it is reacting to the past.⁵²

4.0 Conclusion

In this essay I have argued that the vision report of Ezek 40–48 contains innovations in four areas when compared to earlier vision reports. Its description of an angelic being as the interpreter/guide figure is a supporting element in the argument that Yhwh will return to live with his people, never to leave again. Its use of three cosmic-mythic images (the “very high mountain,” the river and trees of life) create potent promises of order, healing, and political transformation. Its description of sacred space envisions the certainty of divine presence and a future where Yhwh’s temple will not be profaned by an impure people. Its inclusion of priestly legal material is an attempt to counter past abuses to temple and cult and protect sanctity. Earlier

⁴⁸ Cf. Kasher, “Anthropomorphism,” 194.

⁴⁹ E.g. is it realistic to believe that unclean birds could forever be prevented from landing on the Temple (11Q19 46.1–4, even supposing that some kind of apparatus is spoken of), or that the inhabitants of the city would have to travel 3000 cubits outside the city to use the latrine (11Q19 46.13–16)?

⁵⁰ On this tension, see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 327–28; Levenson, *Program of Restoration*, 44–49.

⁵¹ Tuell, *Law of the Temple*, 13–14, 145. Cf. his claim (151): “This Zadokite dominance did not last. With the Mosaic תורה of Ezra, the old balance was restored. However, for the tumultuous first years after the return, the תורה of the Temple in Ezek 40–48 was *the* תורה, the source of stability and meaning in a world of shifting allegiances and the constant threat of annihilation.”

⁵² So Levenson, *Program of Restoration*, 111, 124, 129; Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation*, 42–43, 122–23; Schwartz, “Ultimate Aim,” 313–14; Greenberg, “Design,” 203, 206, 208. Tuell (*Law of the Temple*, 144–45) protests that Ezek 40–48 “nowhere presents itself as a corrective or reform.” It is true that Ezek 40–48 is not a comprehensive reworking of P or H, and many of its details do not seem to be updates of or responses to earlier laws. But the emphasis on boundaries, buffers, and control of access, the statements about the importance of holiness (e.g. Ezek 43:12), the explicit references to past abuses in need of correction (43:7–9, 10; 44:6–13; 45:8–9; 46:18), the reference to a prince (whose role is strictly prescribed) rather than a king, and the fact that Ezek 40–48 presents solutions to the problems raised earlier in the book (e.g. divine absence, profanation of the sanctuary and God’s name, and the iniquity of the people) suggest that it *is* a corrective.

vision reports lack these four features. But it seems to me that Ezekiel did not simply bring new elements to the vision report genre. He was also the first to use a vision report as a vehicle for a sustained depiction of restoration.⁵³

It is impossible to know how Ezekiel's vision report was received by his contemporaries. To what extent were the people "ashamed of their iniquities" (Ezek 43:10) when they heard of the vision? But we do know that Ezekiel's influence on later readers was considerable.⁵⁴ As I have shown, the four elements that represent Ezekiel's innovation can be found in later visionary literature. Ezek 40–48 served as a template that would shape both the experiences and the written accounts of visionaries for centuries to come.

⁵³ While Ezek 8–11 contains an argument about restoration (Ezek 11:14–21), this is embedded as an oracle within the vision report rather than being depicted as something that the prophet "sees." The vision report in Jer 24:1–10 contains hope, but it also contains judgment: this vision is a mixed message proclaiming to the Jerusalemites that hope lay with the exiles rather than with their own doomed community. Moreover, it is far shorter and less developed than Ezekiel's vision report (and some of its statements of hope could be literary expansions correlating it to the rest of the book; cf. Jer 24:6 // 1:10; 18:7–10; 31:28; 42:10; Jer 24:7 // 32:38–39; Jer 24:10 // 14:12; 18:21; 21:7; 27:8). The vision reports in Zechariah contain much about restoration, but these are later than and even dependent on Ezekiel's vision report; see Petersen, "Zechariah's Visions," 202–205 (cf. his comment, 205: "Zechariah has presented an alternative to or a revision of the notions of restoration present in Ezek. xl–xlviii"); Michael R. Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1–8* (LHBOTS 506; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 109–11, 130, 254.

⁵⁴ See the examples above; also Florentino García Martínez, "The Interpretation of the Torah of Ezekiel in the Texts from Qumran," in *Qumranica Minora II: Thematic Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (STDJ 64; ed. Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1–12; Beate Kowalski, "Transformation of Ezekiel in John's Revelation," in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel* (ed. William A. Tooman and Michael A. Lyons; Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock / Pickwick Publications, 2010), 279–311. Ezek 40–48 also influenced non-visionary literature; cf. 4Q159 1.ii.7 (Ezek 45:12); 4Q159 1.ii.13 (Ezek 45:11); 11Q19 16.16–17 (Ezek 43:20; 45:19); 11Q19 37.13–14 (Ezek 46:21–24); 11Q19 45.14 (Ezek 43:7); CD 3.20–4.4 (Ezek 44:15).

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