

A Context for the Sanctuary Terminology Of Ezek 41

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Introduction

In this paper I attempt to provide a context for understanding the sanctuary terminology used in Ezek 41. My object in doing this is to gain insight that will eventually help resolve some difficult problems involving the New Testament's use of sanctuary terminology, especially in the book of Hebrews.¹

Below I examine both Ezek 41 and three other Old Testament passages which make extensive use of sanctuary terminology. These passages are Exod 25-40, Lev 16, and 1 Kgs 6-8. Four tables of data are included below. Within those tables the Hebrew original is compared with three ancient versions (Greek, Syriac, Latin). For convenience I use NIV renderings as section headings.

The Hebrew Original

One thing that makes a study such as this one necessary is the fact that both the object of study and the terms used to describe it change over time.

Sanctuary topology

The Bible's first mention of animal sacrifice omits any reference to the paraphernalia of worship (see Gen 4:4). We can assume, for example, that an altar was used, but this is not stated. At a later time sacrifices were offered on stone altars out of doors (see Gen 8:20; 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 3, 7; also Gen 31:54; 46:1). Then, during the first two years or so after the exodus from Egypt, there was a "Tent of Meeting," to which Moses and Joshua went whenever they needed special counsel or instruction from the Lord (see Exod 27:21; 28:43; 29:4, 10, 11, 30, 32, 42, 44; 30:16, 18, 26, 36; 31:7; 33:7-11; 35:21). These early altars and the first Tent of Meeting call to mind the later court and tabernacle in the more detailed Mosaic cultus. After the sanctuary is built the terms "Tent of Meeting" and "tabernacle" are both used, either conjointly (Exod 40:2, 6, 19) or interchangeably (Exod 40:7, 12, 22, 24, 26, 30, 32; see also 1 Kgs 8:4). But now a distinction is made between two areas within the tent kept separate by a veil.

The apartments. Notice an important difference between the following two passages: "The temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high" (1 Kgs 6:2). "The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high" (vs. 20). The difference is that the first apartment was thirty cubits high, while the second apartment was only twenty cubits high. There were ten cubits of open space between the ceiling of the second apartment and the ceiling of the stone building that contained it.

These facts could be misunderstood. That the space was open does not mean it was visible. The walls of the second apartment extended all the way to the ceiling. "He partitioned off twenty cubits at the rear of the temple with cedar boards from floor to ceiling to form within the temple an inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place" (vs. 16).

Volkmar Fritz, in a paper entitled, "Temple Architecture: What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?"² uses the reduced height and wood construction of the second apartment to argue that Solomon's temple consisted of a single room.

That this Inner Sanctuary was built entirely of wood, rather than stone (the main building material), also suggests that it should not be considered a separate room, but rather as a kind of shrine.³

But in fact one could not go or see more than forty cubits without confronting a wall that, to all appearances, was made of solid metal. "The main hall in front of this room was forty cubits long" (1 Kgs 6:17). Incidentally, the walls of the first apartment were also covered with cedar. "Everything was cedar; no stone was to be seen" (vs. 18). So one could argue that the first apartment--just like the second--was built as a freestanding wooden box within a larger stone building. But this is a specious argument. At issue is the nature of only one of the walls--the partition dividing the temple into two separate apartments. The second apartment lay entirely enclosed behind a wall of cedar overlaid with gold. If this was not a room, what is a room?

In the wilderness tabernacle only a curtain had separated the two parts of the tent. It was as though there were one room but two functions associated with different parts of it. In Solomon's temple the two apartments were separated by a wooden partition, giving rise to Fritz' argument. In the temple envisioned by Ezekiel all disparity between the two apartments has disappeared. "Both the outer sanctuary and the Most Holy Place had double doors. Each door had two leaves--two hinged leaves for each door" (Ezek 41:23-24).⁴ The important thing to notice is that the doors at the entrance to both rooms were of comparable construction. Thus, NIV's use of the English terms "outer sanctuary" (Ezek 41:1, 2, 4, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 25) and "inner sanctuary" (Ezek 41:3, 15, 17, 17) are not misleading, even if they are rather free. My point is that the two apartments become more and more distinct from each other over time.⁵ Because Ezek 41 gives the clearest evidence of this fact it is appropriate that the present study should focus attention on that chapter.

The courts. When the sanctuary was finally replaced by the temple of Solomon an outer court was added beyond the area where the altar and laver stood.⁶ This distinction between two courts outside was similar in some ways to the distinction between two apartments inside.

In Herod's day the temple itself had reached its full development but the system of courts was elaborated further. By this time there were three separate courtyards--one for Gentiles, one for women, and one for priests.⁷ Thus, in Rev 11:1-2, what John means by the "outer court" will be determined in part by our understanding of what timeframe he had in mind:

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. (2) But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. (Rev 11:1-2)

Right after the exodus there was no court. The wilderness tabernacle had one, Solomon's temple (and presumably that of Zerubbabel) had two, and Herod's temple had three. In the tables accompanying this paper there are no references to the court.

Sanctuary terminology

I argue above that there is a gradual process of elaboration as the Tent of Meeting is replaced by the wilderness sanctuary with a "shielding curtain" (Exod 39:34) inside and as this in turn gives way to Solomon's magnificent temple where the two apartments occupy two separate rooms. The ways that different writers talk about these things overlap to a large degree but are by no means identical. Thus, it is not safe to reason from our knowledge of the terms used in one description to those used in another. Each writer's terms must be understood on the basis of that writer's usage. The functions of the various structures are substantially the same throughout--this is a point that deserves emphasis--but the terminology changes.

An especially interesting example of different writers using the same term in more than one way involves the word *haqqôdeš* (lit., "the holy"). In Exod 25-40 and 1 Kgs 6-8 *haqqôdeš* means "Holy Place" (the first or outer apartment). In Lev 16 and Ezek 41 it means "Most Holy Place" (the second or inner apartment). This is not faulty translating but a genuine difference in usage. Similarly, the first apartment is called both *hîšôn* and *hêkâl*. The second apartment is called both *d'ôr* and *habbáyit happ'ânîmî*. Terms used for the structure as a whole range from *ôhel* ("tent"), to *miškân* ("dwelling"), to *habbáyit* ("the house") to *habbinyân* ("the building"). If our sources contain this much variety, we should at least be carefully aware of the fact.

The Greek Septuagint

One reason for doing cross-linguistic comparisons between Hebrew sanctuary terms and their Greek counterparts in the Septuagint is that many of the same terms appear again in the New Testament. This is especially true for the book of Hebrews but also for the book of Revelation.

The Greek lexicons can be positively misleading when we rely on them for insight into sanctuary terminology. Classical writers see the primary inner/outer contrast involving temples as that between *naos* (the shrine itself) and *hieron* (the temple precincts generally). These terms reflect the world in which they wrote. In the Septuagint, however, the Greek word *hieron* appears only seven times (1 Chr 9:27; 29:4; 2 Chr 6:13; Ezek 27:6; 28:18; 45:19; Dan 9:27), never in contrast with *naos*. And when the latter term is used--at least in the Old Testament--it denotes not the innermost room of the temple we are studying (the Most Holy Place), or even the building as a whole in contrast to the enclosed area outside (the temple precincts), but the first or outer apartment of the temple (the Holy Place) (see 1 Kgs 6:3, 5; 7:50 [7:36 LXX]; Ezek 41:1, 4, 15, 23, and 25).

Consider two representative entries. The first is from Alexander Souter's, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*:⁸

naos, a temple, a shrine, that part of the temple where the god himself resides (contrast *hieron*); so also figuratively.

The second is from G. Abbott-Smith's, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*.⁹

naos, -ou, ho, (Att. *neōs*; *naiō*, *to inhabit*), [in LXX (*neōs*, II Mac 6.2, al.) chiefly for *hēkāl*;
1. *a temple* (Hom., Pind., al.). The inmost part of a temple, the shrine (Hdt., Xen., al.); in NT, (a) generally: pl., Ac 17.24; of silver models of a heathen shrine, Ac 19.24; (b) of the *temple* building proper, or *sanctuary*, at Jerusalem, as distinct from *t. hieron* (q.v.), the whole temple enclosure: . . .

The problem is not that these men are bad scholars. They are excellent scholars. But the fact that Herodotus, Xenophon, and other classical writers describe pagan temples using the terms *naos* and *hieron* in the manner indicated is largely (though not wholly) irrelevant if what we are trying to do is understand Greek translations of Moses (Exod 25-40; Lev 16), the compiler of Kings (1 Kgs 6-8), and Ezekiel (Ezek 41). Greek temples had no courtyard and worshipers could enter them. In Jerusalem even the innermost court was inaccessible. The interior of the temple was also divided in a manner only partly analogous to what we find in contemporary Greek and Syrian temples (see appendix). Thus, the objects themselves were different enough that a writer using the same terms to describe them would have to do so in an accommodated sense.

All of this takes a very practical turn when we go to the New Testament and start drawing important theological conclusions from Old Testament terms in Greek translation. This is something we should do, but we should do it with an intelligent awareness of the difficulties involved, one of which is that biblical and classical usage have the potential for being widely different.

Conclusion

My point throughout this brief paper has been that the exegete should not make unwarranted assumptions about what a given Old Testament writer means when he speaks about the sanctuary. Each writer's terms must be understood on the basis of that writer's usage. This is one point. Another is that biblical terms must be defined by biblical data, or must at least give those data prior emphasis. Selected terms from the four major sanctuary passages mentioned earlier are now presented in a series of four tables (see below).

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

¹During 1992 Hebrews will replace Daniel as the primary source of topics for papers appearing in *Historicism*.

²*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 1987, pp. 38-49. See especially p. 41.

³*Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴In Solomon's temple, as in Ezekiel's (which was never built), the second apartment had the same type of golden sockets for door hinges that the first apartment had (see 1 Kgs 7:50).

⁵In the temple of Herod we know that there was a veil between the two apartments because it "was torn in two from top to bottom" at the moment of Christ's death (Matt 27:51). Josephus gives us some insight into how this might be. He suggests that the temple's doors

were adorned with embroidered veils (see *Antiquities* 15.11.3). If this statement applies equally to both apartments, the existence of a veil would not have to preclude the existence of a door.

⁶There are references to "the inner courtyard" (1 Kg 6:36) and "the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple" of Solomon (1 Kgs 8:64). Both were later desecrated by Manasseh ("In both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts" [2 Kgs 21:5]) and restored by Joash ("He pulled down . . . the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the Lord" [2 Kgs 23:12]).

⁷Josephus describes the three courtyards in *Antiquities* 15.11.5, but one comes away wondering about the status of Jewish men. Jewish women could enter the court of women. Presumably Jewish men could go farther. But the only other area he mentions beyond the court of women is the court of priests. In any event, my point is that Herod's temple had more than two courts.

⁸Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916, s.v. *naos*.

⁹3rd ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1936), s.v. *naos*.