

19. The allocation of the land, and the city (*Ezekiel 48*)

In Ezekiel 48:1-7,23-27 we are given the order and arrangement that the twelve tribes of Israel will take in the land, in the Age to come. Levi is omitted because his inheritance forms part of the holy oblation. Joseph is thus given two portions, allocated to his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The land is divided up between the tribes in horizontal strips extending from the east side to the west, starting from the northern boundary of the land: “Now these are the names of the tribes. From the north end to the coast of the way of Hethlon, as one goeth to Hamath, Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus northward, to the coast of Hamath; for these are his sides east and west...”¹. The order that the tribes will take is illustrated in the table opposite.

The position of the tribes

Because the holy oblation is well to the south, seven tribes will allocated their inheritance to the north, and five to the south. Dan was always the northernmost tribe in Old Testament times, and he will take this same position in the Age to come. Similarly, Asher, Naphtali and Manasseh were northern tribes - although half the tribe of

The settlement of the tribes	
Ezekiel 48:1-7	Dan
	Asher
	Naphtali
	Manasseh
	Ephraim
	Reuben
	Judah
Ezekiel 48:8-22	The holy oblation
Ezekiel 48:23-27	Benjamin
	Simeon
	Issachar
	Zebulun
	Gad

¹ Ezekiel 48:1

Manasseh settled east of the Jordan, and the tribe will be re-united. Ephraim will also retain his position in the centre of the land, and thus the two tribes of Joseph will be united in the land. Reuben originally settled on the east side of the river Jordan, and he will be brought over and given an inheritance to the north of Judah. Although Reuben was the firstborn, Judah is the royal tribe, and he will have pride of place adjacent to the holy oblation. Benjamin will have the privileged position immediately to the south of the holy oblation, and this arrangement compares with that in the Old Testament, where Jerusalem with the temple was associated geographically with the territory allocated to Judah and Benjamin. Simeon will occupy a similar place in the south. Issachar and Zebulun were originally northern tribes, but they will move to the south, to make room for

the half tribe of Manasseh which has moved over from the land east of the river Jordan. Similarly, Gad has been brought over from the east, and will be given his inheritance in the extreme south.

The settlement of the tribes according to their birth	
Dan	Bilhah (Rachel's maid)
Asher	Zilpah (Leah's maid)
Naphtali	Bilhah (Rachel's maid)
Manasseh	Rachel (Through Joseph)
Ephraim	Rachel (Through Joseph)
Reuben	Leah
Judah	Leah
The holy oblation	
Benjamin	Rachel
Simeon	Leah
Issachar	Leah
Zebulun	Leah
Gad	Zilpah (Leah's maid)

The table shows that the tribes furthest away from the holy oblation originated from Jacob's concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, whilst the tribes either side of the holy oblation originated from Rachel and Leah.

The holy oblation

The holy oblation has already been mentioned in Ezekiel 45:1-8, but now it is considered in more detail. It will be situated to the south of the land, in between the inheritances of Judah and Benjamin: "And by the border of Judah, from the east side unto the west side, shall be the offering which ye shall offer of five and twenty thousand reeds in breadth, and in length as one of the other parts, from the east side unto the west side: and the sanctuary shall be in the midst of it"². The "offering" is the Hebrew תְּרֻמָּה - *terumah*, elsewhere translated "oblation".

The oblation is divided up into three parts as follows:

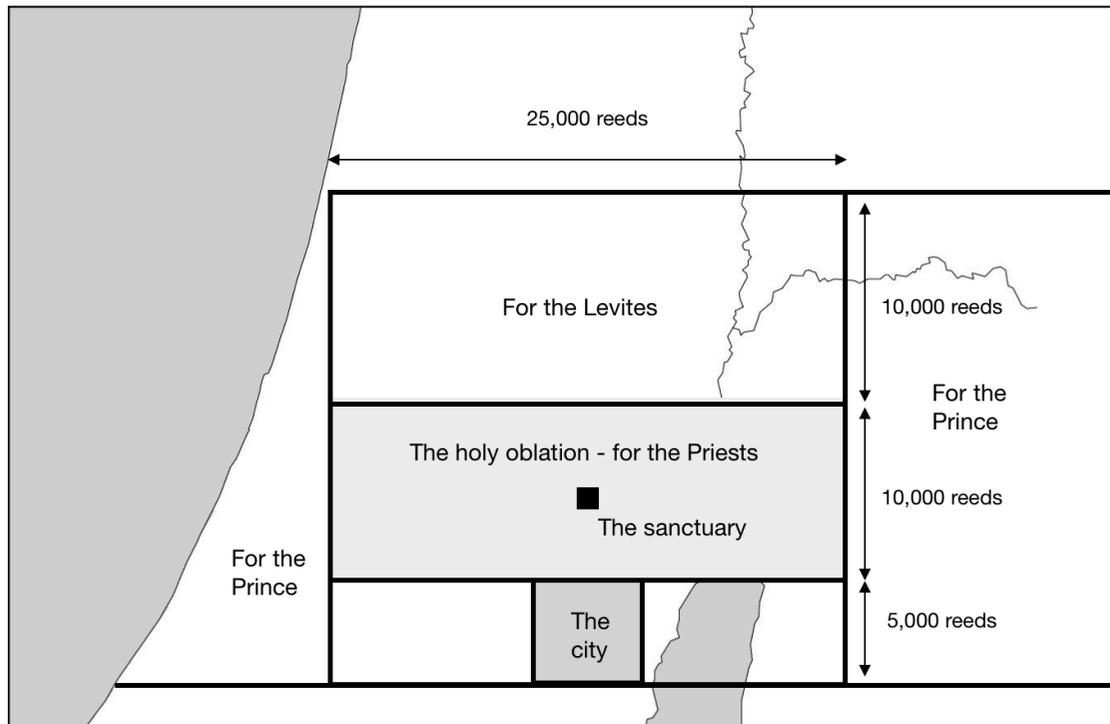
- 1) A portion for the priests (48:10-12)

² Ezekiel 48:8

- 2) A portion for the Levites *48:13,14*)
- 3) A portion for the city (*48:15-20,30-35*)

Ezekiel 48:20 confirms that the whole oblation will occupy a space 25,000 reeds by 25,000 reeds: “All the oblation shall be five and twenty thousand by five and twenty thousand: ye shall offer the holy oblation foursquare, with the possession of the city”.

The holy oblation



The unit of measurement

The AV has inserted “reeds” as the measurement of the holy oblation - in the original Hebrew no measurement is specified. The RSV has inserted “cubits”: “Adjoining the territory of Judah, from the east side to the west, shall be the portion which you shall set apart, twenty-five thousand *cubits* in breadth, and in length equal to one of the tribal portions, from the east side to the west, with the sanctuary in the midst of it”³. The only time the unit of measurement is specified is in 45:2 concerning the open space surrounding the sanctuary itself: “Fifty *cubits*

³ Ezekiel 48:8 RSV

round about for the suburbs thereof”. All that we are told regarding the holy oblation is that it measures twenty five thousand in depth.

Ezekiel was familiar with both units of measurement. One reed represents six cubits⁴. The fact that the cubit is specified when describing the suburbs around the sanctuary suggests that the unspecified measurements elsewhere are different. Also, in Ezekiel 45:2 Ezekiel makes specific reference to the size of the sanctuary: “Of this there shall be *for the sanctuary five hundred in length*, with five hundred in breadth, square round about”. This is a reference to Ezekiel 42:15-20, where Ezekiel measured the whole sanctuary round about, including its perimeter wall, and found it to be five hundred *reeds* square: “Now when he had made an end of measuring the inner house, he brought me forth toward the gate whose prospect is toward the east, and measured it round about. He measured the east side with the measuring reed, five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed round about. He measured the north side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed round about. He measured the south side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed. He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed. He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place”. The reed is specified here in the Hebrew text, and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. The sanctuary and its surrounding precincts measures five hundred reeds square, and therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the holy oblation too is measured in reeds, not cubits.

On a purely practical note, if one were to measure a large area such as the holy oblation, it would be sensible to use the larger unit of measurement, rather than the smaller.

Ezekiel 48:13 says that within the holy oblation “the Levites shall have five and twenty thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth: all the length shall be five and twenty thousand, and the breadth ten thousand”. This represents the entirety of the land that will be given to the tribe of Levi. If the measurement is taken to be the cubit, then this portion becomes implausibly small in comparison to the inheritance of the other tribes.

For these reasons we conclude that the measurements of the holy oblation are in reeds, not cubits. The Authorized Version is correct.

⁴ Ezekiel 40:5

The portion for the priests

The portion for the priests is considered first: “The oblation that ye shall offer unto the LORD shall be of five and twenty thousand in length, and of ten thousand in breadth. And for them, even for the priests, shall be this holy oblation; toward the north five and twenty thousand in length, and toward the west ten thousand in breadth, and toward the east ten thousand in breadth, and toward the south five and twenty thousand in length: and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in the midst thereof. It shall be for the priests that are sanctified of the sons of Zadok; which have kept my charge, which went not astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray. And this oblation of the land that is offered shall be unto them a thing most holy by the border of the Levites”⁵. The portion for the priests is twenty-five thousand reeds long, by ten thousand reeds deep. This priestly portion is called “the *oblation* that ye shall offer unto the LORD... this *holy oblation*... a thing most holy” - in effect, it is an oblation *of* the whole of the holy oblation.

The sanctuary itself will be situated within the portion allotted to the priests who are of the seed of Zadok: “The sanctuary of the LORD shall be in the midst thereof”. This is similar to the arrangements of the tribes around the tabernacle in the wilderness:

- “But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony”⁶.
- “But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death”⁷.

Surrounding the sanctuary there will be a strip of land fifty cubits wide on each side: “Fifty cubits round about for the *suburbs* thereof”⁸. This will serve as a demarcation between the sanctuary and the dwellings of the priests, and will underline the lesson of holiness and separation.

⁵ Ezekiel 48:9-12

⁶ Numbers 1:53

⁷ Numbers 3:38

⁸ Ezekiel 45:2

The portion for the Levites

The portion for the Levites is exactly the same size as the portion for the priests: “And over against the border of the priests the Levites shall have five and twenty thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth: all the length shall be five and twenty thousand, and the breadth ten thousand. And they shall not sell of it, neither exchange, nor alienate the firstfruits of the land: for it is holy unto the LORD”⁹. Whereas the portion of land for the priests is described as “a thing *most holy*”¹⁰, the portion for the Levites is “*holy* unto the LORD”, thus emphasizing the gradation of holiness, the closer one gets to the sanctuary itself.

The Levites are expressly forbidden from selling the land, or the firstfruits from the land. This is an extension of the law found in Leviticus 25:33,34: “And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubile: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. But the field of the suburbs of their cities may not be sold; for it is their perpetual possession”. Under the Law of Moses, the restriction applied to the fields connected to the cities of the Levites, but in the Age to come this restriction will be extended to the whole of the territory of the Levites. No part of it is to be sold, because it is “holy unto the LORD”.

The portion for the city

The portion for the city lies adjacent to the portion for the priests who are of the seed of Zadok. This is confirmed in Ezekiel 45:6: “And ye shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and five and twenty thousand long, *over against the oblation of the holy portion*: it shall be for the whole house of Israel”. It is described in detail in Ezekiel 48:15-20, 30-35. The portion for the city is described as being “a *profane place* for the city, for dwelling, and for suburbs”¹¹. The Hebrew חל - *chol* - denotes something common, or polluted. The “suburbs” may refer to pasture land for cattle¹².

⁹ Ezekiel 48:13,14

¹⁰ Ezekiel 48:12

¹¹ Ezekiel 48:15

¹² Heb. מַגְרָשׁ - *migrash*. See Joshua 14:4: “For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their *suburbs* (מַגְרָשׁ) *for their cattle* and for their substance”. See also Numbers 35:3; Joshua 21:2

The city is “in the midst” of the profane place: “And the five thousand, that are left in the breadth over against the five and twenty thousand, shall be a profane place for the city, for dwelling, and for suburbs: and the city shall be in the midst thereof. And these shall be the measures thereof; the north side four thousand and five hundred, and the south side four thousand and five hundred, and on the east side four thousand and five hundred, and the west side four thousand and five hundred. And the suburbs of the city shall be toward the north two hundred and fifty, and toward the south two hundred and fifty, and toward the east two hundred and fifty, and toward the west two hundred and fifty”¹³. The city is a perfect square, 4,500 reeds by 4,500 reeds, and it is surrounded by pasture land 250 reeds wide. The whole of the city therefore occupies a square 5,000 reeds by 5,000 reeds. Since this is “in the midst” of the profane place, this leaves two equal areas of land on either side, on the east and on the west, 10,000 reeds by 5,000 reeds. This land is for the provision of food for those who serve the city: “And the residue in length over against the oblation of the holy portion shall be ten thousand eastward, and ten thousand westward: and it shall be over against the oblation of the holy portion; and the increase thereof shall be for food unto them that serve the city. And they that serve the city shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel”¹⁴.

The gates of the city

Since “they that serve the city shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel”, it is appropriate that the city should have twelve gates,

The gates of the city	
To the north	Tribal mother
Reuben - the firstborn	Leah
Judah - the royal tribe	Leah
Levi - the priestly tribe	Leah
To the east	
Joseph	Rachel
Benjamin	Rachel
Dan	Rachel via Bilhah
To the south	
Simeon	Leah
Issachar	Leah
Zebulun	Leah
To the west	
Gad	Leah via Zilpah
Asher	Leah via Zilpah
Naphtali	Rachel via Bilhah

¹³ Ezekiel 48:15-17

¹⁴ Ezekiel 48:18,19

one for each tribe¹⁵. Levi has a place, so Joseph replaces Ephraim and Manasseh. The arrangement of the gates is shown in the table on page 217.

The gates on the north and the south correspond with the location of the tribes in the land, to the north and the south of the holy oblation. The gates to the west are three concubine tribes. The gates to the east are Rachel's tribes, including Dan, one of Rachel's children through Bilhah.

The name of the city

Concerning Jerusalem in the Age to come, the prophet Zechariah says that "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle"¹⁶. It would appear that "Jerusalem" here includes an area much greater than just the ancient city itself. It is a tract of land that includes "towns", and "men and cattle". It may be that this relates to the whole of the holy oblation, including the new city that Ezekiel was shown in vision. The new city itself is given a name: "It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, *The LORD is there*"¹⁷¹⁸.

The scriptures are unambitious in their testimony that the city of Jerusalem will be set apart for the purpose of the residence of the King in the Age to come:

- "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart"¹⁹.
- "So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more"²⁰.
- "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD"²¹.

¹⁵ Ezekiel 48:30-34

¹⁶ Zechariah 2:4

¹⁷ Heb. יהוה שמה - *Yahweh Shammah*

¹⁸ Ezekiel 48:35

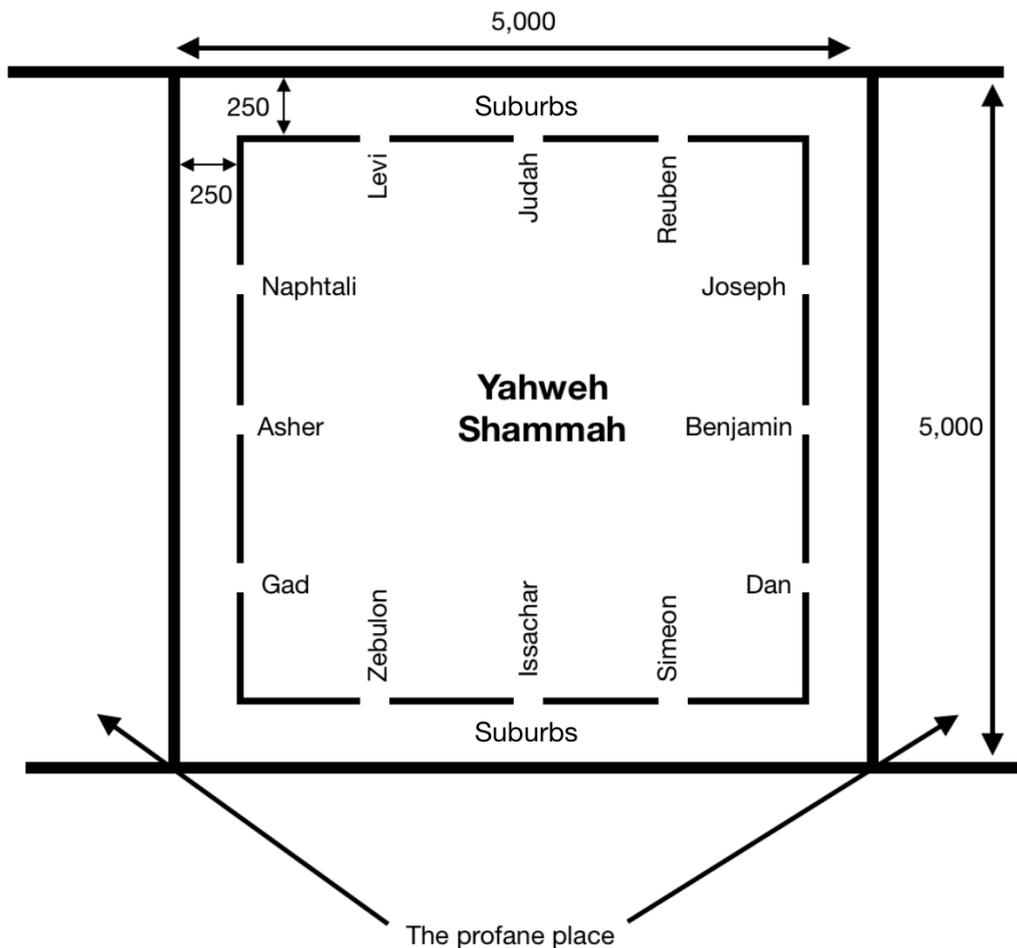
¹⁹ Jeremiah 3:17

²⁰ Joel 3:17

²¹ Zechariah 2:10

- “Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount *Zion*, on the sides of the north, *the city of the great King*”²².
- “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by *Jerusalem*; for it is *the city of the great King*”²³.

The City



²² Psalm 48:2

²³ Matthew 5:34,35

The name of this new city is testimony to the fact that the glory of God will reside permanently in the temple at Jerusalem, and that Jerusalem will be the residence of the King of Israel, reigning upon the throne of David. It may be that the function of the new city will be for accommodating those who come from all nations from year to year, to make their pilgrimage “to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles”²⁴. It will fall to the duty of men “out of all the tribes of Israel” to accommodate these pilgrims during their stay, and to provide all that is necessary for them.

The residue for the prince

Either side of the holy oblation, there are two portions of land that belong to the prince: “And the residue shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy oblation, and of the possession of the city, over against the five and twenty thousand of the oblation toward the east border, and westward over against the five and twenty thousand toward the west border, over against the portions for the prince: and it shall be the holy oblation; and the sanctuary of the house shall be in the midst thereof”²⁵. This was also mentioned in Ezekiel 45:7,8, and the law regulating the prince’s disposal of land to his sons and his servants²⁶ has already been considered²⁷.

²⁴ Zechariah 14:16

²⁵ Ezekiel 48:21

²⁶ Ezekiel 46:16-18

²⁷ See pages 125-126

The allocation of the land

