

Ezekiel 40:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there were seven steps to go up to it, and the arches thereof were before them: and it had palm trees, one on this side, and another on that side, upon the posts thereof.

Analysis

And there were seven steps to go up to it, and the arches thereof were before them: and it had palm trees, one on this side, and another on that side, upon the posts thereof. The **seven steps** (sheva ma'alot, שֶׁבַע מַעְלֹת) ascending to the south gate carry profound symbolic significance. Seven is the biblical number of perfection and completeness—God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, establishing the Sabbath pattern. These steps represent progressive sanctification, the gradual ascent toward holiness required to approach God's presence.

The **palm trees** (timmorim, תְּמָרִים) flanking the posts echo Solomon's temple decoration (1 Kings 6:29, 32) and evoke Eden imagery. Palms symbolize righteousness, victory, and flourishing life in God's presence (Psalm 92:12: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree"). Their placement at the gateway suggests that entering God's presence restores the paradisiacal fellowship lost in Genesis 3. The dual palms—"one on this side, and another on that side"—may represent the balance of God's justice and mercy, or the two witnesses required in biblical testimony.

The phrase "the arches thereof were before them" indicates the vestibule or porch faced those entering. This architectural feature created a threshold experience, a liminal space between common and holy. The ascending steps required physical effort, symbolizing that approaching God demands intentionality and preparation.

One cannot casually or accidentally enter God's presence—it requires deliberate ascent, progressive purification, and mounting the steps of repentance, faith, and sanctification.

Historical Context

The use of seven steps for outer gates (versus eight steps for inner gates in verse 31) establishes a hierarchical progression of holiness. Ancient temples throughout the Near East used ascending levels to mark increasing sanctity, with the innermost shrine at the highest elevation. This architectural theology reinforced the concept of divine transcendence—God dwells "on high" and approaching Him requires upward movement, both physically and spiritually.

Palm tree motifs were common in ancient Israelite religious art, as confirmed by archaeological discoveries. Ivory carvings, seals, and architectural fragments from Iron Age Israel frequently feature palm designs. However, unlike surrounding cultures that associated palms with fertility goddesses (Asherah), Israel's palm imagery celebrated Yahweh as the source of life and blessing. The palm's ability to thrive in harsh desert climates made it an apt symbol for faithful endurance and God-sustained flourishing.

The seven steps also contrast with pagan temple practices that used ramps rather than steps (prohibited for Israelite altars in Exodus 20:26 to prevent immodest exposure). Steps required modesty, care, and conscious effort—reinforcing that worship is not casual but reverent. For the exiles hearing Ezekiel's vision, these details assured them that God had not forgotten the proper patterns of worship and would restore true temple service according to His original design.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What "steps" of progressive sanctification must you climb to draw nearer to God in your spiritual life?
2. How do the palm trees symbolizing righteousness and flourishing challenge your understanding of what it means to approach God's presence?
3. In what ways does the requirement to ascend steps (requiring effort and intentionality) contrast with casual or presumptuous approaches to God?
4. How does the number seven (divine perfection) in these steps remind you that sanctification is God's work, not human achievement?
5. What paradisiacal fellowship with God do you long for, as symbolized by the palm trees recalling Eden?

Interlinear Text

וּמַעַל וְ	שִׁבְעָה	עָלוּתָּהּ	וְאֵלֶיָּהּ	לִפְנֵיהֶם
steps	And there were seven	to go up	to it and the arches	thereof were before
H4609	H7651	H5930	H361	H6440
וְתִמְרֵי יָם	לָהּ	וְאֵת דָּ	מִפְּ	
them and it had palm trees	H0	on this side and another	H6311	
H8561		H259		
וְאֵת דָּ	מִפְּ	אֶל	אֵילָיוֹ	
on this side and another	H6311	H413	on that side upon the posts	
H259			H352	

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 40:22 (Parallel theme): And their windows, and their arches, and their palm trees, were after the measure of the gate that looketh toward the east; and they went up unto it by seven steps; and the arches thereof were before them.

Ezekiel 40:16 (Parallel theme): And there were narrow windows to the little chambers, and to their posts within the gate round about, and likewise to the

arches: and windows were round about inward: and upon each post were palm trees.

Ezekiel 40:6 (Parallel theme): Then came he unto the gate which looketh toward the east, and went up the stairs thereof, and measured the threshold of the gate, which was one reed broad; and the other threshold of the gate, which was one reed broad.

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