

Ezekiel 42:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The massive wall—'five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad' (approximately 3,000 feet or over half a mile per side)—creates a perfect square enclosing the entire temple complex. This wall's purpose is explicitly stated: 'to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place.' The Hebrew חֹל (chol, 'profane') doesn't mean morally evil but common, ordinary, secular—that which is not consecrated. The wall teaches that God's holiness requires clear boundaries. The perfect square shape echoes the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 6:20) and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:16), symbolizing perfection, completeness, and divine order. The five hundred measurement (50 x 10) combines jubilee (50, Leviticus 25) and completeness (10), suggesting ultimate, complete restoration. Reformed theology emphasizes believers are 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people' (1 Peter 2:9)—set apart from the world while ministering within it.

Historical Context

Ancient temples featured enclosure walls defining sacred precincts. Archaeological excavations reveal temple compounds at Babylon, Nineveh, and Karnak with massive boundary walls separating sacred from profane. However, Ezekiel's dimensions exceed any historical Israelite temple—Solomon's temple mount was considerably smaller. This has prompted interpretative debates: Is this literal (millennial temple), symbolic (spiritual realities), or idealized (divine standards)?

Regardless, the principle stands: holiness requires separation. The wall prevented Gentile incursion (a later issue in Herod's temple, Acts 21:28-29) and maintained consecrated ground. For the exiles who had witnessed Jerusalem's walls destroyed and the temple desecrated, this vision promised impenetrable boundaries securing God's dwelling. Ultimately fulfilled in Christ who unites Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14) while maintaining separation from the world (James 4:4).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What 'walls' do you maintain separating consecrated from common areas of your life?
2. How do you balance being 'in the world but not of the world'—maintaining necessary separation without isolationism?
3. Does the massive wall's size challenge casual approaches to holiness that minimize distinctions between sacred and secular?

Interlinear Text

סָבַיב	לֹא	חֹמָה	מָדַד וְ	רוּחַ וְ	לְאַרְבַּע
round about	H0	it had a wall	He measured	sides	it by the four
H5439		H2346	H4058	H7307	H702
מֵאֹת וְ	חֲמִישֵׁי	יָרֵב	חֲמִישֵׁי	אֵלֶיךָ	סָבַיב
hundred	and five	broad	hundred	reeds long	round about
H3967	H2568	H7341	H3967	H753	H5439
לְחֵל:	הֵקֵד דָּשׁ	בֵּין	לְהַבְדִּיל		
and the profane place	between the sanctuary		to make a separation		
H2455	H6944		H914		

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 45:2 (Temple): Of this there shall be for the sanctuary five hundred in length, with five hundred in breadth, square round about; and fifty cubits round about for the suburbs thereof.

Ezekiel 22:26 (Parallel theme): Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

Ezekiel 40:5 (Parallel theme): And behold a wall on the outside of the house round about, and in the man's hand a measuring reed of six cubits long by the cubit and an hand breadth: so he measured the breadth of the building, one reed; and the height, one reed.

Zechariah 2:5 (Parallel theme): For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

Ezekiel 44:23 (Parallel theme): And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Ezekiel 48:15 (Parallel theme): 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.

Isaiah 60:18 (Parallel theme): Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.