



# Blueprints of Blessing

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Ezekiel #9 | Jun 23, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | by Steve Howell



## *Opening: Looking at Plans*

I was digging around in one of our storage areas in the church and stumbled upon these drawings of a proposed addition to this church...from back in the 1980s! I think they were on display when we had our 150<sup>th</sup> church birthday a couple of years ago. Some of you might remember them from that time; others might remember from when the displays were original!

{DISPLAY PICTURES}

What the drawings show is an expansion of the church into what you know as our Education Wing (including the preschool, classrooms, and library). Check it out with me!

You can see an aerial view in this drawing, and in the other you see an interior layout with a rendering of what the building would look like in real life. Comparing the plans to the reality of our current building, you can see a lot of similarities...but you can also see where some changes were made. The location of these\* restrooms shifted. The basement section here\* was not included, so we don't have these\* stairs, either. <sup>1</sup>

The drawings don't just tell an architectural story, though. They tell so much more! When we look at these blueprints, we should imagine what they would have looked like to the members of our church seeing them for the first time. We should imagine what these drawings represented and communicated!

## *Priorities*

Items that are included or excluded in the drawings tell a story of **priorities**. Architects factor in the needs and wants of a client when they create such plans, so it is clear that the elements that made it onto *this* paper were first in the hearts and minds of *this* congregation and its leadership.

What do we notice?

- You can see that the planners more than *doubled* the number of toilets in the proposed bathrooms! *Was that a top priority? I don't know for sure, but I'm guessing it was either...ahem... #1 or #2 (a joke for 9:30/11:00 service).* That change is good, because it signals a priority of **"caring for people's needs."**

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<sup>1</sup> Gesture to the relevant pictures whenever there is an asterisk.

- If you can read from that far away, you can see that many of the rooms in the new addition are labeled as “Class.” Fourteen rooms share the designation, so it’s safe to say that a top priority for this addition was providing space to **study** and learn more about God’s Word!

The priorities built into the design show **what mattered most** to the builders.

## *Growth*

Looking at the size of the building, the space that is added tells a story of **growth**. A church doesn’t just add to a facility for the fun of it. First, it’s not *fun*...it’s a lot of work! Second, and more important, it is *costly*. And a church doesn’t spend that kind of money unless A) the finances have grown to a point where it can be accommodated, and B) the attendance has grown to a point where the expense is justified.

I don’t have the numbers in front of me, but I know there *was* growth in Tonganoxie Christian Church that precipitated this addition. The congregation was larger; the finances were healthy; the need was pressing.

Our church’s willingness to invest in this venture confirms there had been **an expansion** of church members, finances, and (hopefully) health.

## *Future*

The drawings also tell a story for the **future**. These pictures show how the building might look on a clear spring or summer afternoon. Several items might catch your attention, but I notice one feature that matters more than anything else. In front of the doors, we have **people!**

Practically, these people in the drawing are included for scale – they show the relative size of the structure. Our architects weren’t making a *theological* point with the inclusion of these individuals. Yet, their presence steers us to think about faith.

You can see:

- This\* couple is holding hands because Jesus has strengthened their marriage (basement)
- This\* couple is ready to welcome others because they care about people (Preschool entrance - front).
- These\* people are walking up, ready to praise God and worship Him (side)
- This\* teenager looks troubled, and these folks are ready to invest in her life and help her have a changed future (Preschool entrance – side)

Am I reading too much into it? Probably. But isn’t that what this building represents? It represents a future time when such ministry scenarios are plausible. It represents the dream of a time when the church *does* what it is *supposed to do*.

Looking at the people in the pictures through the eyes of faith helps you see the **purpose** of the building. It isn't *the* church; it *serves* the Church. The people walking to and from the building showcase a **future** in which this building is a place where ministry happens and where Jesus is worshiped.

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However you look at them, these are **blueprints of blessing!** The sketches provide hope and excitement for people who long to see God at work in their present as well as their future.

You can see those blessings in *visual* form here. You can see similar blessings in *written* form when we look at today's sermon passage.



## **Divine Development (Ezekiel 40-48)**

If you have your Bible with you, please turn to Ezekiel 40. This will be the final message in our sermon series on the prophetic book of Ezekiel.

*Side Note: I'm so excited that we had a chance to go through this book together! It has been a somewhat lengthy series (starting over two months ago), but it could have been a lot longer. The nine sermons we shared just scratched the surface of the forty-eight chapters of this book! There's so much more to learn, so I want to encourage you to continue digging, continue reading, and continue learning, even after we're done.*

In this final message, we will be spending time in the last eight chapters of the book, referencing a few sections while taking a high-level look at Ezekiel 40-48. To start, we'll turn to the first four verses of Ezekiel 40 to set the scene.



*"On April 28, during the twenty-fifth year of our captivity—fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem—the LORD took hold of me. In a vision from God he took me to the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain. From there I could see toward the south what appeared to be a city. As he brought me nearer, I saw a man whose face shone like bronze standing beside a gateway entrance. He was holding in his hand a linen measuring cord and a measuring rod. He said to me, "Son of man, watch and listen. Pay close attention to everything I show you. You have been brought here so I can show you many things. Then you will return to the people of Israel and tell them everything you have seen."'" (Ezekiel 40:1–4, NLT)*

## ***Judgement and Hope***



Those four verses tie together much of the information we've learned throughout the book of Ezekiel.

This is the twenty-fifth year of the Jewish peoples' captivity and exile in Babylon (now around 573 BC). That makes it fourteen years after the destruction of the Jewish capital city of Jerusalem and the temple of God located there.

Ezekiel, the prophet getting this vision from God, has been receiving God's messages and proclaiming them for decades now. He spent years foretelling Jerusalem's destruction and trying to turn the hearts of his Jewish listeners back to God. It has been difficult. The people haven't listened, and the messages Ezekiel shared were strange, physically demanding, and an emotional/spiritual burden.

There has been a heaviness to Ezekiel as he lived out his messages and spoke against his people's rebellion and idolatry. He saw difficult things – such as a vision of God removing Himself from the Temple and consequently removing His protection and presence from Israel.

Yet, despite the heaviness, there have been glimmers of hope as promises from God intermixed with judgment. Ezekiel strategically arranged the messages in his written work to highlight hope. He followed extended sections of judgment and doom with sections of joy. As a reader, we are moved to feel the weight of judgment pull us down, down, down...but then hope starts to lift us up, up, up!

- God would **restore** His people...for His sake and His glory!
- God would have **victory** over all the forces that oppose Him!

And now, Ezekiel closes with one last presentation to anchor those hopes in the hearts of his countrymen.

## *Overview of Chapters 40-48*



Fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel gets plucked up in a vision (similar to what he experienced back in chapter 8) and "taken" to the land of Israel to observe what God shows him. He is then told to deliver this message and share its content of hope with the exiles back home.

In the vision, Ezekiel is paired up with a heavenly figure (*you can tell he's special because of the descriptions of his radiance and purity*). This divine person is carrying measuring tools, and God commands Ezekiel to pay attention to what he does with the tools.

When we see **items** in visions, usually they have some symbolic value. The tool stands for something else (*ex: Jeremiah 1:11-14 – an almond tree, a boiling pot*). But here in chapter forty, the tools aren't symbolic; they are practical. The divine messenger is just gonna go measure stuff!

He proceeds to start measuring and showing Ezekiel – in great detail! – a new temple and the land in which the temple would be located.

From a reader's standpoint, this section is tough to make it through. It combines features of some of the hardest, most sleep-inducing sections of Scripture!

It mixes together...

- ... **instructions for building**, like the tabernacle construction details in Exodus.
- ... **rules for sacrifices**, like the priestly instructions found in Leviticus.
- ... **divisions of land**, like the geographical boundaries described in Joshua.

Chapters 40-48 are *not* a page-turning thrill ride! Instead, they methodically walk through a lot of mind-numbing detail.

But...before you write them off as boring...remember that mind-numbing detail is what we found in the blueprints of our church's expansion! Floor plan charts for a building addition make for terrible story times at the library or before bed (*ex: "Class – 19' x 24'; Class – 13' x 14'..."*). However, when you understand that the details in this boring reading correspond to an amazing structure you want to see in person, those details become exciting!

We must consider what these details represented and communicated! So, let's read further.



## ***Blessings in the Details***

In terms of content, a simple outline easily explains this entire section.



1. The **temple** is described (Ezekiel 40:5-43:9)
2. The temple **regulations** are described (Ezekiel 43:10-46:24)
3. The temple **lands** are described (Ezekiel 47:1-48:35)

Within each main point, we find detailed descriptions of a future temple awaiting God's final days, an end times vision that is still to come. And despite being lackluster narrative, each description would be joyfully read by those in Ezekiel's audience who listened.

## ***The Temple Complex (Ezekiel 40-43)***



First, they would hear about the temple itself. The details come fast in the book, because our heavenly guide jumps right in and is quick with the ruler! Depending on which translation you use, he might be using OT measurements like cubits and handbreadths (for more elegant and meaningful results), or his measurements might be shown in modern units like feet and miles (to help readers understand the scale). Either way, here's a sample of his measurement activity as chapter forty continues.

*"I could see a wall completely surrounding the Temple area. The man took a measuring rod that was 10½ feet long and measured the wall, and the wall was 10½ feet thick and 10½ feet high. Then he went over to the eastern gateway. He climbed the steps and measured the threshold of the gateway; it was 10½ feet*

front to back. There were guard alcoves on each side built into the gateway passage. Each of these alcoves was 10½ feet square, with a distance between them of 8¾ feet along the passage wall. The gateway's inner threshold, which led to the entry room at the inner end of the gateway passage, was 10½ feet front to back.” (Ezekiel 40:5–7, NLT)

And so on and so forth.

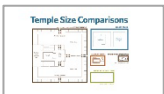


*Ezekiel reads like one of us moving into a new home or apartment. Have you ever done that and started with the measuring tape? You get excited as you realize that your bed DOES fit on that side of the room. You see that the 50-inch flatscreen WILL fit on that wall. If you're old school, you might even sketch it out on graph paper and make cutouts of each piece of furniture (to scale!) so you can virtually rearrange the elements into the perfect layout. Each measurement opens up new information and opportunity. That's how Ezekiel feels.*

As Ezekiel is given this vision, he is shown the entire temple complex. His heavenly guide measures from the outside and gradually moves inward, crossing from the outer courts to the inner courts to the temple sanctuary.

Thankfully, Bible nerds have taken his measurements and done the legwork for us in converting these written descriptions to actual visualizations of the temple and its surrounding structures. Check out these pictures in the slides.

{SHOW PICTURES}



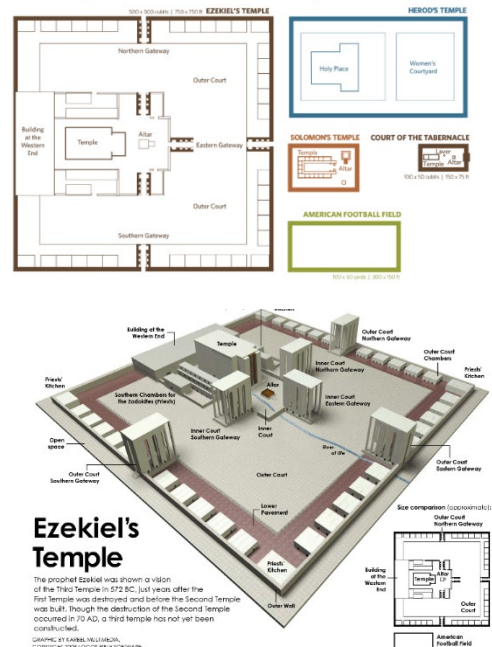
The first slide shows the scale of the structure. You can see how big the sprawling temple complex is – bigger than any other temple in Israel's history (about the same footprint as Nebraska Furniture Mart in Kansas City, KS).



The second slide shows how might look. You can see an outer court and an inner court, each with large gates for access. There are rooms around the complex for various purposes, but the central focus is on the Temple itself.

Much like our exploration of the TCC blueprints, an exploration of these temple blueprints (coupled with the descriptions of the temple's regulations for use) would create excitement! It would also emphasize certain spiritual truths.

## Temple Size Comparisons



I like the following summary from one of my favorite study Bibles:

*...Ezekiel's Temple vision is a theological statement in the form of an architectural plan. Its message is intended to shame Ezekiel's generation for their past and motivate them to be faithful in the future (43:10–11). The vision describes a new world in which boundaries between the holy and the unholy are established and standards are raised, so that God may return to his Temple to dwell among his people once again (see 10:3–4, 18; 11:22–23). Access to the realm of the holy is considerably restricted. Those who were faithful in the past are granted renewed access, while those who had been unfaithful are marginalized. There is a deepened interest in the sacrifices of atonement and purification for the people.<sup>2</sup>*

Reading about this future temple would create joy. But that's not all Ezekiel is shown!

## *The Reallocated Land (Ezekiel 47-48)*

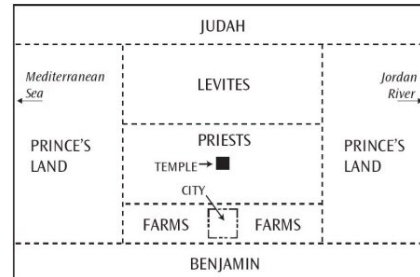
In addition to a new temple with revived, pure worship, the temple complex is located in a region that looks remarkably different on the map than it ever has before. There are some exciting changes!

### **Borders**

We find changes in the **political geography** as the borders of the Promised Land are reorganized. God restructures the Promised Land in several ways. He creates a zone of holiness and protection around the new temple where the temple workers and their support systems are located. The zone provides a buffer that keeps the new temple separated from normal, mundane activities and people.

It is pure, and it is special.

God also reassigns territories to the tribes of Israel. This reassignment is exciting because the people – all twelve tribes – are back and part of this reestablished nation. Yet it looks different from what we found in the Old Testament times (cf. the book of Joshua). The tribes' historical placement within the Promised Land no longer applies.



<sup>2</sup> [New Living Translation Study Bible](#) (Eze 40:1–43:27). (2008). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



*“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “Divide the land in this way for the twelve tribes of Israel: The descendants of Joseph will be given two shares of land. Otherwise each tribe will receive an equal share. I took a solemn oath and swore that I would give this land to your ancestors, and it will now come to you as your possession.” (Ezekiel 47:13–14, NLT)*

Each tribe’s placement is now arranged relative to the Temple. The symmetry of their division now stresses equality.

## Terraforming

In addition to border changes, we also find changes to the **topography** as God terraforms the land.



*“In my vision, the man brought me back to the entrance of the Temple. There I saw a stream flowing east from beneath the door of the Temple and passing to the right of the altar on its south side.” (Ezekiel 47:1, NLT)*

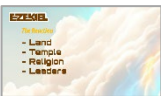


This is a water feature that has never been part of any previous temple. And it supernaturally grows! As the stream flows, it expands from a trickle to a deep river – from ankle-deep, to knee-deep, to waist-deep, to swimmable. The river flows east and eventually transforms the Dead Sea (some of the saltiest water on earth) into fresh water. Life flourishes on the banks and in the water, with ever-producing fruit trees on the banks and abundant fish teeming in the water!

## The Reaction

Imagine hearing all of this from Ezekiel. How would you react? You can picture some people dancing, others standing still, some falling down in worship, others shouting with joy while their neighbors struggled to find words.<sup>3</sup>

For a nation living in exile for decades, feeling the weight of God’s judgment, this “end of days” promise is too good to be true.



- The **land** they lost would be theirs again!
- The **temple** that was destroyed would be back better than ever!
- Their marginalized **religion** would be practiced exclusively!
- Their spiritual **leaders** would be purified and holy!

But there is one detail that surpasses everything else.

<sup>3</sup> I borrowed from Mercy Me’s hit song, “I Can Only Imagine”



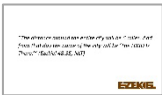
# The Presence of God



*“After this, the man brought me back around to the east gateway. Suddenly, the glory of the God of Israel appeared from the east. The sound of his coming was like the roar of rushing waters, and the whole landscape shone with his glory. This vision was just like the others I had seen, first by the Kebar River and then when he came to destroy Jerusalem. I fell face down on the ground. And the glory of the LORD came into the Temple through the east gateway. Then the Spirit took me up and brought me into the inner courtyard, and the glory of the LORD filled the Temple.” (Ezekiel 43:1–5, NLT)*

After God’s presence was dramatically removed in an earlier vision, now Ezekiel sees God return! The vision of His glory was just as awe-inspiring and strange as it was the first time Ezekiel saw it (the creatures, the wheels, the throne, etc). But instead of leaving Jerusalem...instead of being out of place, next to a river in a foreign land...God was now returning to His Own dwelling place!

It is the presence of God that matters more than anything else. His presence will be the defining characteristic of the temple and the city around it. Ezekiel’s final words in the book tell us as much.



*“The distance around the entire city will be 6 miles. And from that day the name of the city will be ‘The LORD Is There.’” (Ezekiel 48:35, NLT)*

Remember our discussion of the blueprints for our church. What was the most important element? The *people!* The presence of *someone* mattered most in our building. And the presence of Someone (capital “S”) matters most in Ezekiel.

You understand why God’s presence matters, right?



*If you return home after a long trip away, you are excited to be home. You want to sleep in your own bed. You want to sit on your own couch. You want to eat your own food.*

*But more than anything else, you are excited to be greeted. You are excited to be in the presence of someone you love – whether that is a spouse, a child, a parent, a neighbor, a dog, a cat, etc.*

*The “who” matters more than the “what.”*

If something is true in a lesser situation like returning from a vacation, it is true in a greater situation like when we are coming home after a long spiritual exile. We long to be in the presence of God.

The Bible speaks of a similar situation in John 14. There, Jesus describes *our* future dwelling place. He talks about His involvement in its preparation. In other passages (ex:

Revelation 21) we find indications of how amazing this new home will be.<sup>4</sup> Yet as Jesus talks, notice the most important feature.



*“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going.”* (John 14:1–4, NLT)

The presence of God was the promise Ezekiel’s readers needed to hear. The presence of Jesus is the promise you and I need to hear as well.



## ***Closing: Changed by His Presence***

Throughout this entire book, God has been imploring His people to change the way they live. He has instructed, guided, commanded, and threatened. His judgment validated the seriousness of His desire: God wanted His people to be changed.

In this vision, as God puts Himself in their midst, He creates the change. The people put away their past sins and center their life on His presence. “Holiness” is the theme we find woven throughout the blueprints.



*“And this is the basic law of the Temple: absolute holiness! The entire top of the mountain where the Temple is built is holy. Yes, this is the basic law of the Temple.”* (Ezekiel 43:12, NLT)

God’s presence changes us!

In Revelation, we find a similar change related to our own heavenly promise.



*“And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”* (Revelation 21:23–27, NLT)

God’s presence changes us!

Understanding that is the blessing of the blueprints!

As we look through the details (whether written words or rendered art), we see a future that excites and inspires us. We marvel at the structure, but we long for the One who will be there. And we think about how different that life will be when we are dwelling in the presence of a Holy God.

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<sup>4</sup> Fun fact: see the parallels between Ezekiel’s vision and Revelation 21. An angel measuring... Difference is that the city in Revelation doesn’t have a temple; God Himself is the temple!



*If you were building a new home, you'd start preparing now. You'd buy furniture, you'd pick out paint colors. You'd think about the routine you would need to establish to mow a new yard. You'd start budgeting for the new expenses. **You'd order everything around who would be living there with you.***

A blueprint would motivate you to change then, right?

Well, allow Ezekiel and his blueprints to motivate similar changes.

- Know that you, as a follower of Jesus, have a future, glorious home...
- Know that you, as a follower of Jesus, will dwell in the presence of God...
- Know that His presence requires absolute holiness, the kind that only He can create in your life...

... so, start preparing now!



Order everything around the God with whom you will dwell! Let these blueprints be a blessing to you as you prepare to live in His presence forever!

## ***Prayer***

## ***Invitation***

# Notes

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## ***Looking at Plans***

### ***Divine Development (Ezekiel 40-48)***

*Judgement and Hope*

*Overview of Chapters 40-48*

### ***Blessings in the Details***

*The Temple Complex (Ezekiel 40-43)*

*The Reallocated Land (Ezekiel 47-48)*

*Borders (Ezekiel 47:13-14)*

*Terraforming (Ezekiel 47:1)*

*The Reaction*

### ***The Presence of God***

*(Ezekiel 43:1-5; 48:35; John 14:1-4)*

### ***Changed by His Presence***

*(Ezekiel 43:12; Revelation 21:23-27)*

# Discussion Questions

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*Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.*

## ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- Imagine your ideal home. Describe the layout, location, and size of the rooms and areas you would want. How closely does your current living arrangement match up with your dream?

## ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- Read Ezekiel 40:1-4. How does this experience compare with Ezekiel's vision in chapter 8 in content and tone?
- The vision comes years after Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by the Babylonians. What emotions might Ezekiel and his audience face as they hear the descriptions of a new, perfected temple? Compare your answers to Ezekiel 43:10-11.
- Look up some images of the layout of this new temple compared to the older temples in Jewish history. How are they similar? How are they different?
- Holiness is a key theme of this new temple and the priests who serve there (see Ezekiel 44:23-24). What is holiness? Why is it important in this space? How should that holiness extend to other spaces and people?
- Read Ezekiel 43:1-5. Why is this event the highlight of this section of Ezekiel (and even the entire book)? How does the presence of God change how you view the temple? Read 2 Corinthians 6:19-20 and discuss how the presence of God affects that temple.
- God's presence transforms everything! Read Ezekiel 47:1-12. How will the land be changed? IS God's interest in geography (like landscaping), or is the geography changed for another reason? Explain.
- After going through this sermon series on Ezekiel, what are the biggest takeaways you have in terms of knowledge? Insight? Practice?

## ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Praise God for His presence! Ask for Jesus to come quickly so we can enjoy His presence fully and be transformed by His holiness!