

The Life-Giving Waters from the Millennial Temple

Ezekiel 47

Ezekiel 47:1-12 – *“Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. ² He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side.*

³ And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. ⁴ Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. ⁵ Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.⁶ He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river.

⁷ When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. ⁸ Then he said to me: “This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. ⁹ And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. ¹⁰ It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; there will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. ¹¹ But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. ¹² Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

Background Notes

Thus far in our studies in the book of Ezekiel, we've seen some great prophecies about the future of Israel, especially in the second half of the book. Chapter 36 contained a clear and definite prophecy of the return of the Jewish people to their land, and the prediction of a spiritual restoration of the Jewish nation to the Lord.

Certainly the return of the Jewish people to the ancient land of Israel in recent times is a partial fulfillment of this prophecy - but the best is yet to come! A major spiritual revival and spiritual restoration of the secular state of Israel is yet to come. Before the Lord's return to this earth, a godly portion of Jewish people will turn to the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, the Messiah they once rejected. When the Lord returns to this earth, these Jewish believers and the saved Gentiles will welcome the Lord, and they will become an essential part of His earthly kingdom that He will establish at that time. In

chapters 40-48 Ezekiel described many details of that future millennial kingdom, including details of the Temple that will be built in Jerusalem in that day.

The first half of Ezekiel 47 was a description a future river of fresh water that will flow out from the Temple complex in Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, and it will cause the briny water of the Dead Sea to become fresh.

Doctrinal Points

1. The river of water in Ezekiel 47 is literal, but it includes spiritual lessons.

Is the river that was described in these verses a literal river - or was it meant to be a symbolic river? Could this just be figurative language that symbolizes the “living water of the gospel”? After all, the Lord Jesus said to the woman of Samaria that He could give a person living water (John 4). And in John 7:38 He said, “*He who believes in Me... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*” So maybe the water flowing from the Temple in Ezekiel 47 is symbolic of the spiritual living waters - waters that flow from the innermost beings of Christians, who are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. And maybe the fish and fishermen of Ezekiel 47 represent evangelistic efforts on the part of the Church today. After all, didn’t the Lord say, “*Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men*”?

Many Christians take this “symbolic view” of the river of water in Ezekiel 47. However, in order to maintain consistent principles of interpretation for Ezekiel 40-48, we must take the view that the river described here is a *literal* river of water. It is not just symbolic.

In past chapters we belabored the fact that the Temple described in great detail was a prophecy of a *literal* temple that will be built in Jerusalem for the future millennial kingdom of Christ on this earth. Using the same principles of interpretation, we believe that the river water flowing out of this temple will be *literal* spring-fed water. It will get deeper as it follows its course down to the *literal* Dead Sea – a drop of a couple of thousand vertical feet at the present time.

At present, the Dead Sea is so extremely salty that no fish can survive in its waters. In the Millennium, however, the Dead Sea will literally become fresh, and fish will live in it. There will be fishermen from En Gedi, located along the west side of the Dead Sea, to En Eglaim, which is probably on the northwest side. All kinds of fruit trees will grow along the river from Jerusalem to the “formerly Dead” Sea, and their leaves will literally be used for medicinal purposes.

If all this description was just symbolic, then why would the Lord go to the trouble of giving so many details? Why would He bother to give the names of real towns along the west shore of the Dead Sea? Why would He give details about the swamps and marshes remaining salty because salt would be needed as a commodity?

However, just because we believe the river of Ezekiel 47 is literal and not symbolic, that doesn’t mean we can’t draw spiritual lessons from its description. There are many spiritual lessons and spiritual pictures here about the life-changing

effects that come about when the gospel and the water of life are received. But **drawing out spiritual lessons is not the same as spiritualizing the text** to the point where the literal realities are denied. The river water in Ezekiel 47 is literal, but spiritual lessons are included.

2. The division of the land in Ezekiel 47 is literal, and includes the Palestinians.

Do you mean that there's a solution to the present Middle East problems, and the desire of the Palestinians to possess the ancient land of Canaan? Yes, there **is** a solution, and the road to peace is not the so-called "two-state solution" of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. Listen to the biblical solution to the problem:

Ezekiel 47:13-23 - *"Thus says the Lord God: "These are the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions. ¹⁴ You shall inherit it equally with one another; for I raised My hand in an oath to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance.*

¹⁵ "This shall be the border of the land on the north: from the Great Sea, by the road to Hethlon, as one goes to Zedad,¹⁶ Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim (which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath), to Hazar Hatticon (which is on the border of Hauran). ¹⁷ Thus the boundary shall be from the Sea to Hazar Enan, the border of Damascus; and as for the north, northward, it is the border of Hamath. This is the north side.

¹⁸ "On the east side you shall mark out the border from between Hauran and Damascus, and between Gilead and the land of Israel, along the Jordan, and along the eastern side of the sea. This is the east side. ¹⁹ "The south side, toward the South, shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribah by Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea. This is the south side, toward the South. ²⁰ "The west side shall be the Great Sea, from the southern boundary until one comes to a point opposite Hamath. This is the west side.

²¹ "Thus you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. ²² It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.²³ And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance," says the Lord God.

Did you see the biblical way that the Lord will solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem when He returns in the future? The solution is in the last three verses of the chapter. *"Thus you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. ²² It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.²³ And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance," says the Lord God."*

When the Lord returns, the land of Israel will be divided among the twelve tribes. Within each tribal area, people who are not Jewish (called “strangers” in this passage) will be landowners as well. In fact, they will be treated as full Israeli citizens – there will be no “second class status.” Those people who are not Jews, including the Palestinians, will not be concentrated in one area. They will be scattered throughout all the tribes of Israel, and they will have their inheritance throughout the land.

Chapter 48 will give more details of the division of the land, but the division of the land in Ezekiel 47 is *literal*, and it includes the Palestinians.

Practical Application

Don't dump the details!

Don't dump or throw out the details of Scripture! In the second half of Ezekiel 47 many details were given about the boundaries of the land that will be possessed by restored Israel in the future, when the Lord returns. These details are very similar, by the way, to the overall boundaries of the land described in Numbers 34 when Israel first entered the Promised Land - the land that God had given them. In fact, some of the same place names are given!

At the time of the conquest of Canaan, Israel rightly believed that the Lord was speaking about *literal* boundaries, right down to the details of place names and directions. Here in Ezekiel 47, we believe the very similar description of the land for the restored Israel of the future, when the Lord returns, is also *literal* - right down to the details of place names and directions.

If they're not meant to be literal, why did the Lord give all these details? And what do all the details mean, if they're not literal? Why would the Lord give them? It makes good logical sense to believe that the Lord meant these details to be *literal*.

When it comes to Scripture, don't throw out the details. Don't dump the details!