

"The Water of Life"

Lesson Text: Ezekiel 47:1-12

Background Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1-12

Devotional Reading: John 4:7-15

The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. ² He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side.

³ As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits^[a] and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. ⁴ He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. ⁵ He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. ⁶ He asked me, “Son of man, do you see this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷ When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. ⁸ He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah,^[b] where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. ⁹ Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. ¹⁰ Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. ¹¹ But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. ¹² Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Today's Aim

- **Facts:** to show us the facts about the river of healing that flows from God.
- **Principle:** to affirm that all who drink of the water of life will receive complete healing from God.
- **Application:** to show that when we turn to God's provision of the water of life, we will be healed.

Introduction

The Dead Sea, on the border between modern Israel and Jordan, is a place featuring a couple of world records. It is the lowest spot on earth, about 1,350 feet below the level of the nearby

Mediterranean Sea. It is also one of the saltiest natural bodies of water on earth, estimated to be between 5 and 10 times saltier than normal sea water.

The Dead Sea has no outlet, and its water level is maintained by evaporation—and the arid location of the Dead Sea allows a lot of evaporation. Its high concentration of salt and minerals does not permit plants or fish to live within it, thus its name Dead Sea.

Today's lesson looks prophetically at a vision in which a mighty freshwater stream flows out of the temple in Jerusalem eastward to the Dead Sea. The result is that a life-giving, tree-lined river is created that brings the Dead Sea to life and allows it to be teeming with fish.

Does the Dead Sea remind you of anything in your life? Do you have personal areas that are “dead zones,” where all the life seems to have been sucked out? Maybe you have relationships that are toxic and joy-killing. Today's lesson is about spiritual refreshment and renewal. Our application is that Ezekiel's vision of a renewed Dead Sea can help us understand the renewal of our personal dead seas.

Lesson Background

Travelers to Israel today come away impressed with the centrality of water in the nation's life. It is a key issue in modern Israel's foreign and domestic policies, and ingenious methods have been devised to sustain the nation's agriculture and provide water for a growing city population.

Archaeological remains bear witness to the importance of water in ancient Israel as well. The Israelites did not irrigate their lands. They depended on seasonal rains, melting snow from the Lebanon Mountains, and springs in the hill country. Every sizable town had a reservoir, or cistern, to catch and conserve rainwater. Cities created ingenious shafts and tunnels to protect their water supply from enemy attack.

All of this makes this week's lesson especially significant. In a vision of the future, Ezekiel was shown a water supply of highest quality and unfailling quantity. It is a fitting symbol of the material and spiritual blessings of Messiah's reign.

The Divine Source of the Water (Ezekiel 47:1-2)

Today's text is part of a larger picture in which important details of the future messianic reign were revealed to Ezekiel. First, the prophet saw the temple (Ezek. 40:1 – 42:20). This was followed by the return of God's glory (Ezek. 43:1-12) and the restored worship (43:13 – 46:24). Then comes today's passage on the water of life (47:1-12) and a description of the newly divided land and the city.

“The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple” (Ezek. 47:1). These words connect our text with the previous of the temple and its worship. The man who brought Ezekiel to the door was an angel who had already guided him through the temple (40:1-3). The door that is mentioned was the entrance to the temple building, which faced east (47:1; cf. 41:2-3). There the

prophet observed that water was flowing out from under the threshold, originating in the presence of God.

1. Where was Ezekiel when he first saw the flow of water? Where did it originate? (Ezekiel 47:1)

To show Ezekiel where it flowed from there, his angelic guide took him out the north gate, since the eastern gate had been closed (cf. 44:1-3). He then led him around to the “*outer gate facing east*” (47:2) on the eastern edge of the courtyard.

Once again, he saw the water flowing from the right (south) side of the gate. The verb translated “trickled” literally means “ran out” or “rippled.” The significance of this verb is that the word suggests that the water was a small stream as it left the temple, but the waters multiplied in volume. This reminds us that God often uses small things and miraculously multiply them so that man can only give glory to God.

The Increasing Depth of the Water (Ezek. 47:3-5)

2. How great was the volume of water when Ezekiel first saw it? (v. 2)

The supernatural creation of the stream now becomes evident. The angelic guide led Ezekiel out of Jerusalem to show him the direction and depth of the water. Though we do not know the exact direction of the stream since we do not know whether southern Palestine’s topology in the future will remain the same as it is today or if it will be supernaturally altered.

Assuming the changed contours of Israel, Zechariah declares that His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which will then split in two. Half of the mountain will move to the north and half to the south, creating a valley in between (Zechariah 14:4). In this case half of the waters will flow southeastward through this valley into the Dead Sea. The other half will flow west into the Mediterranean (v. 8).

3. Assuming changed contours of Israel’s land in the future, in what directions will the waters flow?

The angel enabled Ezekiel to experience this ever-deepening stream. Every thousand cubits (or about 1,500 feet), the water became wider and deeper (cf. v. 3- 5). In about a mile and a third, the water was so deep he could swim in it, but it was too wide for him to cross it. We must note that this miraculous river did not have any feeder streams feeding into it, which testifies of God’s omnipotent power.

4. How far did the water flow before it became a river? (vs. 3-5)

This prophetic vision will be fulfilled literally in future Israel, but it also has many spiritual applications. For example, it aptly portrays the progressive way God has revealed Himself and extended His blessings to mankind.

It started small with the vision to Abraham and the other patriarchs. He broadened and deepened His stream of truths to Israel through His prophets. Eventually, in Christ, it has become a mighty river of blessing to humanity that none can fathom.

This vision also reminds us generally that all good gifts come from God Himself (cf. Jas. 1:17) and that He will infinitely multiply them for the trusting worshipper. Foremost among these gifts is eternal life (v. 18), which Jesus elsewhere likened to living water (John 4:10-14) and likened with the ministry of the Spirit (7:37-39). How tragic that many refuse this water, failing to acknowledge its divine source!

5. What are some spiritual lessons we can learn from this vision?

The Beneficial Effects of the Living River (Ezekiel 47:6-12)

Instead of taking Ezekiel any further along the river, the angel wanted Ezekiel to look at the effects of the water on the things it touched. While addressing Ezekiel as “*son of man*” (a chosen and endowed representative of humanity before God), he asked, “*Do you see this?*” This was an invitation to ponder the marvel of what he had seen. But it also prepared him for the great wonders he was about to see.

While the angel led Ezekiel along the banks of the river, the prophet saw plenty of trees on both sides of the river. The contents of the river transformed the vegetation on both sides. The normally brown, barren lands of the lower Jordan Valley were now covered with a veritable forest of trees. We later learn that these trees were always green and bore fruit profusely. All of this was possible only because of the life-giving flow from God’s throne.

6. How will the river of life change vegetation around it? (vs. 6-7)

“The sea” that is the destination of the living river is the Dead Sea, also called the salt sea in the Bible (example: Genesis 14:3). As mentioned earlier, the Dead Sea is 5 to 10 times saltier than normal ocean water. This means that the river would need to pump in 5 to 10 times as much water as the sea originally contained just to bring its salt concentration down to that of the ocean.

But this is not what Ezekiel intends us to understand. The Dead Sea, the deadest body of water on the face of the earth, is being “healed” through the gracious power of God. There is no natural explanation for this, because it can be understood only as a miracle.

7. What is the Dead Sea like? How will it be changed? (v. 8)

Even after we become Christians and have our sins forgiven, we still have painful areas of our lives that need to be healed because of damage done. In some of these areas we have been the victims; in other areas we have been the perpetrators. Whether it’s the long-term effects of childhood abuse, the pain of damaged relationships, or the consequences of our sins, we all need God’s healing touch on our lives.

Remembering that God loves us unconditionally is a good beginning place. This knowledge gives us the courage to bring our problems to Him for His healing grace. Often, God provides healing help through the church in the form of support groups, counselors, and biblical teaching. By sharing how we have been healed, we can encourage others to believe that change is possible.

8. If God can heal “the deadest body of water on the face of the earth,” what can He do to heal you? What has He already done? How can you be a source of healing to others?

The healing of the Dead Sea will mean that an abundant of fish will swim in the sea. Then fishing will become a popular occupation from “En-gedi” (v. 10) to Eneglaim (an unknown region) where their nets will enclose fish of many species.

We can also interpret verses 9-11 as, 1) viewing ourselves as the fishermen, 2) Jesus as the living water, and 3) our “nets” as spreading the gospel to catch souls (“a very great multitude of fish”) for Christ, “for they shall be healed.”

Notice that the muddy places and marshes are not connected to the living water, “*will not become fresh*” (v. 11). The point is that one must be near the River of Life to gain its benefits. Without this miraculous flow of fresh water, the sea will remain its old, salty self.

9. What change will the transformation of the Dead Sea bring about? How can we apply this change to our lives today (vs. 9-11)

Since the water is life giving, the leaves on the trees will also be life-giving. First, there will be numerous trees on both sides of the river. Second, they will be productive and long-lasting. The leaves will not fade and the trees will bear fruit according to his months (c.f. Psalm 1:3).

Finally, the trees will produce more than enough fruit to sustain human life. In addition the leaves on the trees will have medical properties that will be life sustaining as well. Ezekiel’s account of the life-giving river is very similar to John’s description of the same river in Revelation 22:1-2.

10. What characteristics will trees along the river have? (v. 12)

While Jesus says that His followers will be a source of “rivers of living water,” we occasionally may wonder how, if we feel that our lives are all dried up. Remember: the only way that living water can flow within us and outward from us is by being connected to the source, which is Jesus (John 4:10). The further we are from Him in our daily walk, the more likely we are to see the joy evaporate from our lives. We can stay connected to Jesus by allowing His Holy Spirit, who indwells us, to have His way with us. When we shut ourselves off from the Holy Spirit by ignoring Bible study, neglecting prayer, and indulging in sinful behavior, we will begin to dry up spiritually. We need to seek the Spirit’s help so we can enjoy life “more abundantly” (John 10:10).

11. What can we do to restart the water of life flowing through us and out to others?

Conclusion

The personal water bottle is everywhere today, carried by some people everywhere they go. It is even common to see water bottles in many worship services, either among the congregants or being sipped by worship leaders and others up front. Although some people carry water as more of a fashion accessory, this widespread phenomenon also reflects increased respect for health values of drinking plenty of pure water.

When He attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, Jesus proclaimed, “He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Jesus was not quoting a single, particular Old Testament passage, but the general message derived from several passages, including our lesson text for today. The apostle John goes on to explain, “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive” (John 7:39).

This means that we can enjoy right now the benefits of the spiritual refreshment that come from the Holy Spirit. He can right now break down the spiritual barriers that keep us from having complete fellowship with our creator. He can reverse all the life-killing areas of our selves, transforming us into the likeness of God’s Son, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Holy Spirit brings joy, peace, and comfort to the most troubled soul.

Prayer

Lord God, we have a thirst for Your Spirit. We need our souls to be refreshed by Your sweet water of life. May the waters of Your living river flood us, cleanse us, and sustain us every day, even as we look forward to being in Your presence for all eternity. We pray in the name of the one who promised us living water, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thought to Remember

Seek God’s living water; accept no substitutes.