

Message #51

Ezekiel 47:1-12

In the Bible, especially in the O.T., there are many predictions that say one day there will be many major geographical and topological changes that will take place in Israel's land (Is. 35:6-7; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:4-8).

One of the predictions that is made is that there will be a change in water (Is. 35:6-7; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:4-8). Israel's land will feature a life-giving river that will cause the land of Israel to blossom as a Rose so that it is like the "Garden of Eden" (Ezek. 36:35).

There are some interpreters of the Bible who believe that this really isn't true. There are some who suggest this is all symbolic and just is designed to teach the church that all blessings flow from God.

Well here is my question. Why does God actually make Ezekiel wade in the water at various depth levels and then say, "have you seen this"? (v. 6) if this is not real? I believe that those who are teaching this is symbolic are on very dangerous interpretive grounds because they are subtracting from what God's Word literally says.

There is nothing in this text that would indicate this is symbolic. What Ezekiel does is literal. What Ezekiel sees is literal. What Ezekiel writes is literal. The problem is many do not grasp dispensationalism and, as a result, they don't have a clue as to what this text is even teaching.

In the Bible there are three main rivers that are revealed:

- 1) There was the river that flowed out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10).
- 2) There is the River that will flow out of the Temple in the Millennium (Ezek. 47:1-12).
- 3) There is the River that will flow out of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-2).

This river will not flow out of a Temple because there will be no Temple (Rev. 21:22).

The river that is seen and described here is the river that will flow out of the Temple in the Millennium.

There is a literal life-giving river that will flow from the Temple, when Jesus Christ is back here on earth. The water has specific depth levels. There are trees on the banks of the river. There are many living creatures and fish that live in the water. There are fishermen and there are swamps and marshes. Frankly, I don't see one thing in these verses that would lead us to conclude anything other than this is a literal body of water.

What Ezekiel writes here is this:

A KEY FEATURE OF THE MILLENNIUM WILL BE A LIFE-GIVING RIVER THAT WILL FLOW OUT OF THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM THAT WILL CAUSE GOD'S BLESSINGS TO FLOW IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL.

This prediction of a river flowing is not only found in Ezekiel. It was also mentioned in Joel 3:18 and Zechariah 14:8. Certainly this river will be a visible and tangible reminder that God is the one who is providing the wonderful blessings of life right from His Throne in Jerusalem.

There is nothing symbolic in any of this language. There are 13 realities that are brought out:

Reality #1 - Ezekiel is brought back to the entrance of the Temple. **47:1a**

There is no question that this is designed to show that life blessings do come from God. It is also clear that this is a literal place where Ezekiel is taken.

Reality #2 - Ezekiel sees a small stream of water flowing from under the threshold. **47:1b**

The word “threshold” (miptan) refers to the stone that is at the base of the doorway that is visible. The trickle of water that Ezekiel sees is water flowing toward the east.

Reality #3 - Ezekiel sees the small stream flowing from the right side of the Temple and south of the altar. **47:1c**

This stream starts flowing from the south of the altar from the right side of the Temple if facing east. So if one is looking out toward the courtyard, the water is flowing from the right side of the Temple.

Reality #4 - Ezekiel is led out the north gate to see the gate facing east. **47:2a**

Ezekiel is led outside of the Temple complex via the north gate and walks back around to where the East gate is located.

It certainly would have been easier to go out the east gate in the first place, but we may remember that the east gate is barred from human traffic because that was the gate the Lord had entered (44:1-2).

Reality #5 - Ezekiel sees water trickling out under the wall on the south side of the east gate. **47:2b**

The word “trickling” means it was a small stream that made a small “gurgling” sound. So the water leaves the Temple complex and begins to flow out into the land and as it leaves it makes a soothing, small trickling sound.

Reality #6 - Ezekiel watches the depth level of the stream measured. **47:3-5**

The east gate was the starting point and Ezekiel observes a man head downstream measuring the depth levels of the river. Now we are going to stick with the 21 inch per cubit measurement because this is what Ezekiel has been using throughout the book:

(Measurement #1) - The first 1,000 cubits brought the depth level to ankle depth. **47:3**

Now if we use 21 inches per cubit, 1,000 cubits is 21,000 inches or 1,175 feet or 583 yards. So walking downstream, 583 yards or well over ¼ mile, the depth level is raised to ankle depth. Carefully observe that Ezekiel literally walked across the stream at this ankle depth level.

(Measurement #2) - The second 1,000 cubits brought the depth level to knee depth. **47:4a**

At this point one is over 1,000 yards or nearly 2/3rds of a mile downstream. Again, when Ezekiel gets to this point, he literally wades across the water.

(Measurement #3) - The third 1,000 cubits brought the depth level to loin or thigh depth. **47:4b**

At this point one is 5,250 feet or 1,750 yards or almost a mile downstream. Now when Ezekiel gets about one mile away, he again wades across the river which is now about waist depth level.

(Measurement #4) - The fourth 1,000 cubits brought the depth level to swimming depth. **47:5**

Now at this point the water is 7,000 feet or 2,333 yards or over 1 1/3rd mile downstream from the gate.

What is interesting about reaching this swimming level that is so deep it cannot be forded is that no other streams or tributaries are feeding into this main river. So the river is flowing and getting deeper and deeper. Ezekiel did not apparently swim across this.

So God is actually producing a miracle here in causing this river to reach these depth levels to reach their “geometric increase” every 1,000 cubits as the water flows toward the sea.

Now there are some who say this is a symbolic picture of church history. It began small at ankle level then it spread out to the Gentiles and reached knee level and then it spread all over the world to swimming level under Constantine.

But there is nothing in this language that indicates that. In fact, notice **verse 6**.

Reality #7 - Ezekiel is brought back to the bank of the river. **47:6**

The guide who has been showing Ezekiel these things wants to make sure Ezekiel has seen this. The prophet has been looking at the water and wading in the water and now the man showing him these things brings him back to the banks and says to Ezekiel, have you seen this? Of course he had, he just waded through it.

Reality #8 - Ezekiel sees many trees on both sides of the river. **47:7**

Apparently he had not noticed these before this moment. He had been so focused on the depth level of the water that he missed the trees.

This is a key point of Bible interpretation. One can get so focused on a text, that one misses the context. One can get so caught up with the study of words, that one misses the paragraphs.

Reality #9 - Ezekiel learns that the water flows into the sea and makes the sea fresh water. **47:8**

The Arabah is the Jordan valley that runs south from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is six times saltier than the oceans and when this water flows into that sea, it will become a fresh water that is able to support life. This will be an amazing land and sea miracle.

Right now from the Temple Mount to the Dead Sea the elevation drop is 3,700 feet. The Temple mount is 2,430 feet above Sea level and the Dead Sea is 1,290 feet below sea level. The distance from the Temple to the Dead Sea is about 25 miles.

Reality #10 - Ezekiel saw all kinds of animals and fish sustaining their life from this river. **47:9**

This river will be literally life-giving.

Reality #11 - Ezekiel saw fishermen spreading nets catching all kinds of fish. **47:10**

The total number of fish will be equal to that found in the Mediterranean (**47:10**). Engedi is located on the western shore of the Dead Sea and it is uncertain as to the exact location of Eneglaim. It is speculated that the two cities are opposites. What this shows us is that the entire body of water is life sustaining, whether on the north side or south side, the west side or east side. God will be blessing everything in Israel's land.

Reality #12 - Ezekiel saw some swamps and marshes that are left for salt. **47:11**

This is fascinating because the swamps and marshes are not part of the curse, they are for a purpose. The purpose of these places will be for salt and minerals.

Reality #13 - Ezekiel saw all kinds of trees growing on both sides of the river. **47:12**

Right now there are no fruit trees that grow near the Dead Sea. The trees here will produce fruit and food. Their leaves never wither. The fruit does not rot. It is the water from the Temple that is producing this.

There is medicinal value in the leaves found on these trees. Apparently those who are sick and injured can find healing from these leaves.

As we said, there are some interpreters who view this allegorically:

The river represents the life-giving grace of God.

The river's increase represents the growth of the church.

The fourfold measurement represents the four gospels.

The last depth of the river represents the depth of the last gospel.

The fruit of the trees represent the good fruit works.

The foliage represents the inner joy that comes by good works.

The course of the river—Temple to Dead Sea represents the course of the gospel—

Jerusalem to Galilee to pagans.

The freshening power of the water represents the sanctifying power.

The fisherman and fish represents those who go after lost souls.

The swamps and marshes for salt represents luke-warm Christians who lost their saltiness.

Although it is very imaginative to allegorically interpret things this way, the truth is, this is a literal river that will come from a literal Temple in a literal Jerusalem.

Israel's land will become a land of blessing and God Himself and His temple will be the source of those blessings.

Now I do think there is a legitimate spiritual application we may draw from this wonderful text in Ezekiel:

1) There is a life-giving fount drawn from Immanuel's veins that can give eternal life. It is a living water and if one will drink from it, he will never thirst again (John 4:13-14). One who believes on Jesus Christ will have eternal life.

2) The source of all blessings at all times is God. Praise God from whom All blessings flow.