Ezekiel 47:13-48:35 "A New Inheritance" April 24, 2011
Psalm 2
Revelation 21

As we conclude our tour through Ezekiel's prophecy,
we need to go back to the beginning.

Throughout Ezekiel we have asked the question
"what does it mean to be Jerusalem in Babylon?"
"what does it mean to live as the people of God in exile?"

Because Ezekiel's description of this new temple, this new land, this new city,
would have come to the Exiles in Babylon.

Ezekiel is describing an eschatological vision –
a theological architecture and geography that describes things
not so much the way they *will be*,
as the way they *should be*.

The glory of the LORD had appeared to Ezekiel by the Chebar Canal in chapter 1 –
and then in chapters 8-11, Ezekiel was taken in a vision to Jerusalem,
where he watched as the glory of the LORD departed from Jerusalem –
chased out by the idolatry and wickedness of the people of God.

After setting forth the coming judgment upon Jerusalem in chapters 12-24,
and the coming judgment upon the nations in chapters 25-32,
and after setting forth the promised restoration in chapters 33-39,
now, in chapters 40-48, Ezekiel sees the way things should be.

Or, as I've suggested, he sees the new creation,
which he describes in Mosaic language.
Ezekiel's depiction of the inheritance is limited entirely to the Promised Land.

Psalm 2 broadens our perspective,
as the Psalmist declares that the LORD will give his king – the Son of God –
"the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."

Sing Psalm 2
Read Revelation 21

Introduction: Israel's Inheritance and Ours

21 "So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. 22 You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. 23 In whatever tribe the sojourner resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance, declares the Lord GOD.

We need to start our consideration of the inheritance with the end of chapter 47.
Sojourners who reside in Israel and who have children among them
shall be considered native-born children of Israel.

We have seen throughout Ezekiel that the prophet does not spend much time
thinking about how the nations will be blessed through the restoration of Israel.
For Ezekiel, the point is that the remnant of Israel will be saved –
and the nations will know that Yahweh is God when he saves his people
and destroys his enemies (both Gentiles and rebellious Israelites).

We've seen a smattering of glimpses of hope for the nations –
but verses 21-23 of Ezekiel 47 are the clearest statement of salvation for Gentiles
who join themselves to Israel.

Notice that for Ezekiel the foreigner is to be given a *full inheritance*
with the native-born.
While Moses had required Israel to treat foreigners well –
it appears that for most of Israel's history,
foreigners were prevented from owning land.
So here, Ezekiel insists that there should be no distinction between foreigners and native-born
when it comes to the inheritance of the land.

Ezekiel (like Jesus' own disciples) would probably assume that this would include circumcision.
But as Paul points out in Romans 4,
"the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world
did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith"
(Romans 4:13 – or, to use the language of verse 10,
he received this promise "before he was circumcised.")
Paul's whole argument in Ephesians is that both Jews and Gentiles
are fellow-heirs in Jesus Christ –
because he has reconciled "us both to God in one body through the cross"
so that "through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (2:16, 18).

Ezekiel says that Gentiles will not be second-class citizens in the new inheritance.

Paul's conclusion follows very neatly from Ezekiel's premise:
"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints
and members of the household of God,
built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,
in whom the whole structure, being joined together,
grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."
(2:19-22)

In other words, Ezekiel's requirement that believing Gentiles be included in the inheritance
sets up Paul's whole theology of the "one new man" in Christ.

Or, to say it another way,
Ezekiel 47-48 finally comes to pass in the resurrection of Jesus!

1. **The Boundaries of the Land (47:13-23)**

13 Thus says the Lord GOD: "This is the boundary by which you shall divide the land for inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions. 14 And you shall divide equally what I swore to give to your fathers. This land shall fall to you as your inheritance.

Verses 13-14 emphasize the importance of *equality* in the distribution of the land.
"You shall divide equally what I swore to give to your fathers."
Ezekiel has frequently objected to the oppression of the poor.
Now he says that when Israel returns to the land,
they are to divide the land equally.
Incidentally, there was no such division of the land under Ezra or Nehemiah!

In order to divide the land, Israel would need full possession of the land –
and when they returned from exile, the Persians were still in charge!

But then again,
as we have seen, Ezekiel is not really talking about a literal restoration.
Ezekiel is describing the new covenant.
And so we should not be surprised at all to hear in Acts 2ff
that when the Spirit of God was poured out upon the church,
they divided their possessions according to the needs of the body.

Once the Son of God was raised from the dead,
the new humanity started acting like the restored Israel
of which Ezekiel had spoken!

And that is why Ezekiel's vision of the new inheritance
needs to find expression in the life of the church.

I've been reading some of Stuart Robinson's letters to R. J. Breckinridge.
Robinson was an Old School Presbyterian pastor in Baltimore
who preached powerfully on the importance of ministering to the poor.
His congregation started several Sunday schools to teach poor children around the city,
and set themselves the goal of planting churches in poor neighborhoods,
following the exhortation of Henry Ruffner,
who urged city churches to think about job creation, education, -
in short, community redevelopment! –
as a diaconal ministry of the whole church.

Ezekiel envisions a world in which all of man's relationships are rightly ordered:
true worship is restored in the temple – man is rightly related to God;
all people have a meaningful place in society – man is rightly related to each other,
and to the land – to creation itself!

We should not think of Ezekiel 40-48 as a literal description of something that "will be" –
but rather as a theological description of what *is in fact the case today*
in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[15] "This shall be the boundary of the land: On the north side, from the Great Sea by way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, and on to Zedad, [16] Berothah, Sibraim (which lies on the border between Damascus and Hamath), as far as Hazer-hatticon, which is on the border of Hauran. [17] So the boundary shall run from the sea to Hazar-enan, which is on the northern border of Damascus, with the border of Hamath to the north. This shall be the north side.
[18] "On the east side, the boundary shall run between Hauran and Damascus; along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel; to the eastern sea and as far as Tamar. This shall be the east side.
[19] "On the south side, it shall run from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah-kadesh, from there along the Brook of Egypt to the Great Sea. This shall be the south side.
[20] "On the west side, the Great Sea shall be the boundary to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This shall be the west side.

Verses 15-20 describe the boundaries of the land.
In Numbers 34 God told Moses the boundaries of the land, starting in the south.
Now, God begins in the north.
The boundaries are given in terms of a list of cities
whose territories form the perimeter of the land.

The land of Gilead (home to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh)
is excluded from Israel in this account (as also in Numbers 34).
The east bank of the Jordan was never promised to Israel,
either through Moses or through Ezekiel.

You may recall that the 2 ½ tribes on the east side of the Jordan
recognized that they dwelt outside of the land,
and so built an altar of witness to remind the other tribes,
that they too were part of Israel! (Joshua 22)

Today, we tend to define borders in terms of a line –
so there is a very definite line between Michigan and Indiana.
If you live on the other side of this imaginary line, you are in another state.

This modern definition would strike the ancients as silly.
Most of the people who live in Niles, Michigan, work in South Bend.
Back when we were in different time zones,
people in Niles invariably had two different clocks in their house,

so that they could remember which was "South Bend time."
According to the ancient definition of boundaries,
Niles is in Indiana!
Gary is in Illinois, and New Albany is in Kentucky!

They didn't have modern surveying equipment –
and what is more, they would have found it useless.
Borders were determined by power and authority –
not by drawing arbitrary lines.

But this is what makes chapter 48 so fascinating!
Because while the borders of the land are very realistic,
the portions of the tribes seem far more arbitrary!

2. The Portions of the Tribes (48:1-29)

Verses 1-29 begin with the allotment for the seven northern tribes (v1-7),
then covers the holy portion for the priest in the middle (v8-14)
then explains the holy city that is part of the central portion (v15-20)
including the land for the priests and Levites,
and the surrounding territory of the prince (v21-22)
and concludes with the allotment for the five southern tribes (v23-29).

So, how many tribes are there?
13

7 in the north, 5 in the south, and 1 in the middle (Levi).
Remember that while Jacob only had 12 sons,
he adopted Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephriam, as his own.
Therefore, since Joseph gets a double portion,
there are 13 tribes (14 if you include Joseph as a separate tribe,
which sometimes happens!).
In many lists Simeon drops out (since his inheritance was included with Judah)
but here Simeon is restored to full inheritance.

There are twelve tribes that inherit – together with one (Levi) who does not.

a. The Northern Tribes (v1-7)

[1]"These are the names of the tribes: Beginning at the northern extreme, beside the way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, as far as Hazar-enan (which is on the northern border of Damascus over against Hamath), and extending from the east side to the west, Dan, one portion. [2]Adjoining the territory of Dan, from the east side to the west, Asher, one portion. [3]Adjoining the territory of Asher, from the east side to the west, Naphtali, one portion. [4]Adjoining the territory of Naphtali, from the east side to the west, Manasseh, one portion. [5]Adjoining the territory of Manasseh, from the east side to the west, Ephraim, one portion. [6]Adjoining the territory of Ephraim, from the east side to the west, Reuben, one portion. [7]Adjoining the territory of Reuben, from the east side to the west, Judah, one portion.

Verses 1-7 describe the portions of the seven northern tribes
If you compare maps of the original inheritance under Joshua
with the new inheritance in Ezekiel,
you will see that many tribes are totally displaced.
For one thing, the inheritance here stretches further north –
all the way to the furthest extent of Solomon's kingdom at Lebo-Hamath.
For another, the portions here sound arbitrary,
without any regard for natural boundaries.

This shows us a major difference between the portions in Moses and the portions in Ezekiel:
in Moses (and Joshua) the portions describe actual land
that the tribes had to actually divide up!
in Ezekiel the portions are an idealized picture
and since no one would ever have to figure out the distribution of the land
an idealized version works just fine.

So what does Ezekiel's picture of the land tell us?
First, no one gets to go home!
The land is divided in such a way that virtually no one gets the same land
that they got in Moses' distribution of the land.
This fits well with Ezekiel's idea of a new covenant,
a new priesthood, a new law –
and, here, a new inheritance.
Ezekiel does not anticipate a mere "restoration" of the Mosaic covenant.
Ezekiel sees an entire revision of the covenant
that will guarantee that *no one* may return to the land they *once* possessed
and claim it as "theirs."
Second, notice how the tribes are arranged.
The eight sons of Leah and Rachel are arranged with four on either side –
while the four sons of the concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, are on the edges.
Judah and Benjamin are placed on either side of the holy portion –
but they are reversed –
with Judah occupying land formerly given to Benjamin,
and Benjamin occupying land formerly given to Judah.
Third, foreigners inherit together with the native born.
Now, notice what *kind* of foreigners!
Those who settle down and have children (with the assumption of circumcision).
Ezekiel has not forgotten the danger of idolatry and rebellion –
but Israel's rebellion in the days of the kings
was led by native-born people!
The solution is not some sort of nativism –
the solution is *faith* –
the solution is allowing *all those* who believe God's promises
to share in the inheritance that God gives his people.

The New Testament shows how this is to be accomplished:
it is not that Gentiles need to be circumcised –
but that Jews and Gentiles can live together in Christ as one new man –
a new humanity that together shares in the inheritance of Christ.

And what did Christ inherit?
Paul says in Romans 4 that the promise to Abraham
was not just a piece of real estate in the Middle East –
but that he would inherit the whole earth.
In the reconciliation of Israel – in the restoration of the people of God
brought about in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead –
God has reconciled humanity to himself.

In verses 8-14 we hear about the Holy Portion at the center of the land.

b. The Holy Portion (v8-14)

8 "Adjoining the territory of Judah, from the east side to the west, shall be the portion which you shall set apart, 25,000 cubits in breadth, and in length equal to one of the tribal portions, from the east side to the west, with the sanctuary in the midst of it. 9 The portion that you shall set apart for the LORD shall be 25,000 cubits in length, and 20,000 in breadth. 10 These shall be the allotments of the holy portion: the priests shall have an allotment measuring 25,000 cubits on the northern side, 10,000 cubits in breadth on the western side, 10,000 in breadth on the eastern side, and 25,000 in length on the southern side, with the sanctuary of the LORD in the midst of it. 11 This shall be for the consecrated priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept my charge, who did not go astray when the people of Israel went astray, as the Levites did. 12 And it shall belong to them as a special portion from the holy portion of the land, a most holy place, adjoining the territory of the Levites. 13 And alongside the territory of the priests, the Levites shall have an allotment 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in breadth. The whole length shall be 25,000 cubits and the breadth 20,000. 14 They shall not sell or exchange any of it. They shall not alienate this choice portion of the land, for it is holy to the LORD.

The measurements are exactly the same as we heard in chapter 45.
The sanctuary is in the middle – with the Zadokite priests and the Levites
surrounding the sanctuary.
Verse 14 insists that they shall not sell or exchange this "choice portion of the land,
for it is holy to the LORD."
This reminds us of how important it is to have a holy priesthood –
because if the priests fail, then there is no holiness for the people of God.

As we've compared Ezekiel with Hebrews
we have been continually reminded of the importance of Christ's priesthood!
Because of his resurrection from the dead,
Jesus is a priest who lives forever.
It is not that Jesus does away with the need for priests –
rather, Jesus *is* the priest who lives forever –
and whose sacrifice on the cross remains forever valid,
because of his resurrection from the dead.

Verses 15-20 then turn our attention to the city:

c. The City (v15-20)

15 "The remainder, 5,000 cubits in breadth and 25,000 in length, shall be for common use for the city, for dwellings and for open country. In the midst of it shall be the city, 16 and these shall be its measurements: the north side 4,500 cubits, the south side 4,500, the east side 4,500, and the west side 4,500. 17 And the city shall have open land: on the north 250 cubits, on the south 250, on the east 250, and on the west 250. 18 The remainder of the length alongside the holy portion shall be 10,000 cubits to the east, and 10,000 to the west, and it shall be alongside the holy portion. Its produce shall be food for the workers of the city. 19 And the workers of the city, from all the tribes of Israel, shall till it. 20 The whole portion that you shall set apart shall be 25,000 cubits square, that is, the holy portion together with the property of the city.

The city is said to be "for common use" –
with workers "from all the tribes of Israel."
This is a radically different conception of a city than anything in Israel before it.
Ancient cities were fortresses – designed to maintain and preserve the king's power.
Jerusalem – the city of David – was no different.

But this city belongs to the people!

Note also the relationship between the "city" and the "sanctuary."
Solomon's temple was built adjacent to the city of Jerusalem.
The walls of the city were extended to encompass the temple.

Ezekiel's temple is nearly five miles away from Ezekiel's city.
The "city" is the place where people from all over Israel stay
when they come to worship at the temple.
But you would have to walk five miles –
the distance from here to Notre Dame –
in order to worship at the temple!
And to get there, you would have to cross the 10,000 cubits (about 3 miles)
of the Levitical lands –
and almost 5,000 cubits (about 1 ½ miles)
of the priestly lands –
in order to get from the city to the temple.

Why does God make it so difficult to get to the temple?

Remember all that we have seen throughout Ezekiel about how the temple was defiled?!
In Ezekiel's vision, the temple is 5 miles away from the city,
so that the temple can remain free from the corruption of the city.
We have already seen that the prince is kept at a distance –
now we see that the city is kept at a distance –
so that holiness can be preserved in Israel!

d. The Prince's Portion (v21-22)

[21] "What remains on both sides of the holy portion and of the property of the city shall belong to the prince. Extending from the 25,000 cubits of the holy portion to the east border, and westward from the 25,000 cubits to the west border, parallel to the tribal portions, it shall belong to the prince. The holy portion with the sanctuary of the temple shall be in its midst. [22]It shall be separate from the property of the Levites and the property of the city, which are in the midst of that which belongs to the prince. The portion of the prince shall lie between the territory of Judah and the territory of Benjamin.

Verses 21-22 then explain how the prince's portion
gives him an important role in the defense of the holy place,
but at the same time keeps him at a distance.

e. The Southern Tribes (v23-29)

[23]"As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west, Benjamin, one portion. [24]Adjoining the territory of Benjamin, from the east side to the west, Simeon, one portion. [25]Adjoining the territory of Simeon, from the east side to the west, Issachar, one portion. [26]Adjoining the territory of Issachar, from the east side to the west, Zebulun, one portion. [27]Adjoining the territory of Zebulun, from the east side to the west, Gad, one portion. [28]And adjoining the territory of Gad to the south, the boundary shall run from Tamar to the waters of Meribah-kadesh, from there along the Brook of Egypt to the Great Sea. [29]This is the land that you shall allot as an inheritance among the tribes of Israel, and these are their portions, declares the Lord GOD.

And then verses 23-29 give the portions of the other five tribes.

3. The Gates of the City (48:30-35)

[30]"These shall be the exits of the city: On the north side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, [31] three gates, the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi, the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. [32]On the east side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan. [33]On the south side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar, and the gate of Zebulun. [34]On the west side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali. [35]The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There."

Verses 30-35 then describe the walls and gates of the city.
The city is to be 4500 cubits square – about two kilometers – or 1.3 miles.
The city has 12 gates – 3 on each side.

A city with 12 gates means a city that is easily accessible to all the people –
and since the gates are named after the tribes,
it is clear that this city is not the city of the prince
(like Jerusalem was the city of David),
but this is the city of the people of God.

And because the city is described as a square,

it is properly conceived of as a holy city.

We've already seen that this city is five miles away from the temple
in order to preserve the holiness of the temple.

But have you thought about the implications of all this?

This means that this city *cannot* be Jerusalem!
And the temple *cannot* be the temple in Jerusalem.

So not only do we have a new temple, a new priesthood, a new law, a new inheritance,
and a new covenant – but we even have a new city!

Ezekiel's city is *not* Jerusalem.

Conclusion: The LORD Is There

Ezekiel's city has a new name:
the LORD is There.

Some have tried to say that this *is* Jerusalem –
only Jerusalem with a new name.
But Ezekiel is very clear that each of the tribes will have an equal portion.
You cannot possibly fit five tribes south of Jerusalem,
and claim that that is even remotely "equal"
to the massive stretch of land past Damascus in the north!

So what do we do with Ezekiel's new city?

Just look at how John interprets it in Revelation 21.

John will call this city the *new Jerusalem* (21:2)
or the *holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*. (21:10),
but this makes it clear that the *earthly* Jerusalem is *not in view*.

John likewise follows Ezekiel in having the twelve gates
inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel –
but John also includes 12 foundations –
inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles of the lamb.

Unlike Ezekiel,
John does not put the temple 5 miles away –
rather he says that there is no need for a temple,
for its temple "is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (21:22)

Ezekiel's temple had been built around the holy geometry of the square.

You can see that the preservation of the holiness of the 500 cubit by 500 cubit sanctuary
is designed to be replicated in the 25,000 cubit by 25,000 cubit holy portion –
and even finds symmetry with the square city – 4500 cubits by 4500 cubits;

and it is only one step more to see that this holiness is to spread to the whole earth.

And you see this in how Ezekiel's square city
has become John's 12,000 stadia cube.

(just for reference sake, 12,000 stadia is the distance between Rome and Jerusalem!)
(around 1400 miles)

But also it is important to see that John envisions the New Jerusalem
to be very similar to Ezekiel's holy city –
in that it is designed to keep out the impure and wicked.

John says "nothing unclean will ever enter it,
nor anyone who does what is detestable or false,
but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." (21:27)

Last week we looked at the river that flowed from the temple to the Dead Sea,
and brought life to that most barren of waters –

but I made a mistake when referring to the marshlands.

When the text says that the marshes will remain salt –
I neglected to pay careful attention to the word that is used there.

I said that salt is necessary and useful –
but the word used in Ezekiel is that the marshes will not be healed
(a point that is apparently made better in the Chinese translation
than by most American commentators!).

In other words, this life-giving water will *not* heal everything.
Perhaps I should have paid more attention to how Revelation 22 speaks of this river!
Because Revelation 22 also says that not everyone will be healed –
but the wicked will remain *outside* the city,
even as the marshes will remain outside the healing power of the river.

Even so, as this holy city – the heavenly Zion – extends throughout the earth,
we must acknowledge that *not everyone* is healed;
as the message of the resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed,
there are those who do not repent – who do not believe –
and who perish in their sins.

That is why Revelation 21-22 continually juxtapose the glorious vision of the heavenly city

with the inheritance of "the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, …
murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars,
their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur,
which is the second death."

I know – that's not what you want to hear on Easter Sunday.
But that *is* the message of the resurrection of Jesus!
As Paul said at Athens,
"God…commands all people everywhere to repent,
because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness
by a man whom he has appointed;
and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."
(Acts 17:30-31)

The message of the resurrection is "Jesus is raised from the dead! Repent or perish!"