



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 17 Issue 18

May 6, 2018

Comfort and Hope to a Pilgrim People, Part 4

The worship that God prescribed for the Tabernacle was the basis for the worship of the Temple. And the worship that God prescribed for the Temple was the basis for the worship of the Synagogue during the exile.

Now, without a temple, God's people simply followed the liturgy of the Temple and everywhere there was a sacrifice, they substituted either a reading of scripture, a prayer, or a sermon. Where this becomes significant for us is that in the New Testament era, the worship of the

Synagogue was the basis upon which God's people approached the Lord in worship, only they Christianized it.

We see a similar progression when it comes to the working out our salvation as redeemed sinners in a hostile world. In our study of Ezekiel, we have seen that the Organizing Principle of this book was derived from the Exodus/Conquest Narratives (Exodus, Leviticus, Num., Deuteronomy). The Implication is that — and this is wonderful — though God's people may have thought that they lost everything when the Babylonians destroyed their city and brought them into exile, yet just like their fathers during the era of the Exodus, they were in fact part of a massive leap forward in God's Redemptive program. Their weakness did NOT reflect a weakness in God! Their loss was NOT the result of a lack of love on the part of God!

Their awful condition did NOT reflect a lack of activity on the part of God — in fact it was just the opposite. God was more active now than He had been in the Kingdom Years, for He was moving Redemptive History Forward thousands of miles (just like He did during the era of the Exodus)! As he patterned this prophecy after the Exodus/Conquest narratives, Ezekiel's message in this prophecy is clear: God's people now must view themselves as part of a Second Exodus and Conquest!

Now this is where it gets incredible. The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation which details the end of this world and the beginning of the next- was patterned after the book of Ezekiel! Consider the chart. Do you see? The detailing of the Revelation of God's Glory, the Consummation of God's Redemptive Plan, the Full and Final Re-Claiming of this world by God — as described in Revelation — was taken from/inspired by Ezekiel.¹

Do you understand what this means? First, because Revelation is linked to Ezekiel, the exile referenced in both books are one and the same (which was the point of Ezekiel when it came to His generation and the Exodus/Conquest Narratives). So once again we have Biblical grounds to understand that when a person becomes a Christian, they join their brethren who have been called by God to live out their lives in the Diaspora.

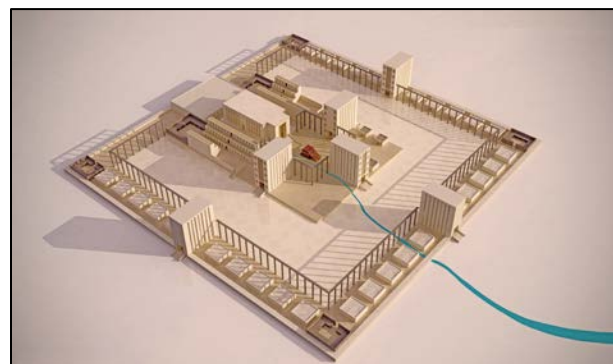
Ezekiel in Revelation		
Theophany	<i>Revelation 1</i>	<i>Ezekiel 1</i>
Throne-Vision	<i>Revelation 4</i>	<i>Ezekiel 1</i>
The Book	<i>Revelation 5</i>	<i>Ezekiel 2-3</i>
Four Plagues	<i>Revelation 6:1-8</i>	<i>Ezekiel 5</i>
Slain Under the Altar	<i>Revelation 6:9-11</i>	<i>Ezekiel 6</i>
Wrath of God	<i>Revelation 6:12-17</i>	<i>Ezekiel 7</i>
Seal on the Saint's Foreheads	<i>Revelation 7</i>	<i>Ezekiel 9</i>
Angel and Four Corners	<i>Revelation 7:1-2</i>	<i>Ezekiel 7:2-3</i>
Coals from the Altar	<i>Revelation 8</i>	<i>Ezekiel 10</i>
Leaders Addressed	<i>Revelation 10:1-3</i>	<i>Ezekiel 11-14</i>
No More Delay	<i>Revelation 10:1-7</i>	<i>Ezekiel 12</i>
Eating of the Book	<i>Revelation 10:8-11</i>	<i>Ezekiel 2</i>
Measuring of the Temple	<i>Revelation 11:1-2</i>	<i>Ezekiel 40-43</i>
Jerusalem and Sodom	<i>Revelation 11:8</i>	<i>Ezekiel 16</i>
False Worship Condemned	<i>Revelation 13:11-18</i>	<i>Ezekiel 14</i>
Cup of Wrath	<i>Revelation 14</i>	<i>Ezekiel 23</i>
Vine of the Land	<i>Revelation 14:18-20</i>	<i>Ezekiel 15</i>
Great Harlot	<i>Revelation 17-18</i>	<i>Ezekiel 16, 23</i>
Lament Over the City	<i>Revelation 18</i>	<i>Ezekiel 27</i>
Scavengers' Feast	<i>Revelation 19</i>	<i>Ezekiel 38</i>
First Resurrection	<i>Revelation 20:4-6</i>	<i>Ezekiel 37</i>
Gog and Magog	<i>Revelation 20:7-9</i>	<i>Ezekiel 38-39</i>
New Jerusalem	<i>Revelation 21</i>	<i>Ezekiel 40-48</i>
River of Life	<i>Revelation 22</i>	<i>Ezekiel 47</i>

Secondly, since God in Revelation essentially took the teaching of Ezekiel and expanded upon it, if there is any confusion when it comes to Ezekiel, clarification may very well be found in Revelation!

The climax of Ezekiel is Ezekiel 40-48 which is an incredibly difficult section. Yet thankfully, Revelation 21-22 contains a divine commentary on this passage which we are going to utilize this morning in our study.

We now see that the message of comfort and hope comes because the blessing of the Lord is bound exclusively to Jesus Christ. (Ezekiel 47:1-2, 9, 12).

Ezekiel 47:1-2, "Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And

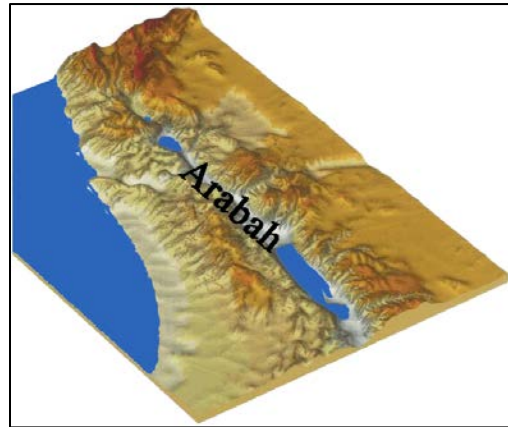


the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. And he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of *the gate* that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side.”

Toward the end of Ezekiel 40-48, God details a final element in His description of this city/temple. In this temple, God has placed an amazing river whose origin comes from the Holy of Holies- or as referenced here, “...from under the threshold of the house...” which is the slab of stone which served as the base for the Holy of Holies!² In other words, the source of this river is God!

Now notice these elements:

1. The stream does NOT begin as a large river, BUT the trickling of water as if from a bottle. That is the idea in v. 2b of “water... trickling from the south side [of the holy place].”³ But then it somehow grows the further it flows (cf. vv. 3-5). In fact the river gets so large it could not be forded on foot by Ezekiel; in fact, Ezekiel could swim in it if he desired (v. 5)!
2. The stream is somewhat peculiar in that its course is unnatural. From Jerusalem it would flow down into the Kidron Valley, up over the Mount of Olives, and then cross a series of valleys and mountain ranges before it reaches the Arabah. In fact, the uniqueness of this river just keeps emerging.



Ezekiel 47:7-8a: “Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river there *were* very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then he said to me, ‘These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea...’”

Today the “Arabah” is used of the region south of the Dead Sea. Yet in Bible times, the “Arabah” was used to reference the Jordan Rift from the Sea of Galilee down through the Dead Sea and on into the region south of the Dead Sea. That means that “the sea” referenced here as the destination of “stream” would have been the Dead Sea which is rather significant.

The surface of the Dead Sea is 1300 ft. below sea level, making it not only the lowest point in Palestine, but the lowest point on the surface of the earth! With a salinity today of 26-35%, this body of water is aptly referred to as “the Salt Sea” by many. Three factors contribute to the deadness of the Dead Sea.

1. It is fed by salty, feeder streams that emerge from underground sulfurous springs which then flow through nitrous-rich soil.

2. The sea has no outlet which means that all the minerals which flow into it are trapped and so remain in it.
3. The hot, dry atmosphere of Palestine produces an evaporation rate in the Dead Sea equal to the inflow of water from feeder streams and rivers.

All of this means that at the time of Ezekiel, after about a thousand of years of accumulation, the high amounts of sodium, magnesium, calcium, potassium, and the like had left the Dead Sea virtually void of life. In other words, if you want a picture of deadness in the ancient world, this was it! This body of water contained no visible life. If you placed a fish in it, the fish would die rather quickly. Again, it is a picture of death!

God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah on account of man's sin (cf. Genesis 13:10; 19:24-25) left this sea, dead! Yet what would happen when the water of the river flowing from the presence of God entered into this dead sea?

Ezekiel 47:8b, "...and the waters *of the sea* become fresh."

The language itself tells us that this was intended to be an amazing statement! The word for "fresh" (רָפָא [rapha]) is used in the Bible for the healing of a diseased body and that is what this life-giving river would do to the waters of this sea! As the waters from this "river of life" entered the Dead Sea, its saline water would be "healed" such that the sea would become NOT brackish (as one might expect), BUT "super fresh" such that it not only would be able to sustain life, but super life!

Ezekiel 47:9, "And it will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there, and *the others* become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes."

The language here is from Genesis 1:20-21 which speaks of the "swarming of living creatures" at creation! On top of that, there also is here a clear allusion to Genesis 2:10 which likewise had a river which "...flowed out of Eden to water the garden."

Notice from this verse that the "river" described here is a life-giving deluge, "...every place where the river goes, will live"! In other words, it produces "super life" - abundant life! Anything and everything that swims in it thrives, grows, and so reaches its full potential! In fact, the water is filled with so much life-giving potential, the trees nourished by the water are dramatically affected.

Ezekiel 47:12, "And by the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all *kinds of trees* for food. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month [regardless of the season- be it hot, cold, winter, or summer] because their water flows from the sanctuary [in other words, from God!], and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

This is unbelievable! The trees that are nourished by “this river of life” will BOTH sustain any and all who eat of its fruit AS WELL AS heal any and all who are nursed by it leaves! As wonderful as this description is, what is this talking about? What in reality is this describing? Thankfully we are not left to speculate here. For once again we have an authoritative commentary on this very text.

Revelation 22:1-2: “And he showed me a river of the water of life [a life-giving river], clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street [the reason this sounds like Ezekiel 47 is because it was taken from Ezekiel 47! That means Revelation 22 is here talking about the same river as was Ezekiel!]. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month [once again, the language is that of Ezekiel 47. No matter the season of life, if a living thing is nourished on this stream, it will produce fruit], and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

It is significant that Revelation 22 is speaking of the final state — the New Heavens and Earth — for that places Ezekiel 47 in its proper context! Just like at the dawn of this world as described in Genesis, in the final state there will be “a river” that flows from the presence of God which will nourish everything and everyone in that world!

What is that river? To answer this we firstly note that there will be no sea/ocean in the eternal state (Revelation 21:1). That means there could be no hydrologic cycle (similar to the cycle at creation), and hence no rain to fill a river. Thus, “the water of life” as referenced here could NOT be water as we know it. If that is so, then what is this River of Life? To answer the question we consult further God’s commentary. Speaking of the River of Life described in Revelation 22:

Revelation 21:6, “And He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts [this is speaking in reference to those living in John’s day and beyond] from the spring of the water of life without cost.’”

Did you get that? The water that comes from the River of Life is available to any and all in this age — which means we most certainly here are NOT talking about literal water! We see this further in Revelation 22 following God’s description of the final state which included a description of the River of Life, this is how God/John closed this prophecy:

Revelation 22:17, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”

There is no question that “the water of life” (referenced in Ezekiel 47 and now here in Revelation 22) is available to any and all in this age who seek it or ask for it!

Do you understand what this means? Again while Ezekiel 47 & Revelation 22 are describing the final state, nevertheless the life-giving water referenced in these texts were and are available to any and every one of God's people living as aliens and strangers in the wilderness of this life!

So what is this "River of Life"? Nothing less than the life that God grants in Christ Jesus! Listen to what the Lord taught in His first Advent to the Samaritan woman:

John 4:13-14, "Jesus answered and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.'"

Christ's words here clearly allude to Genesis 2:10, Ezekiel 47, and Revelation 22! The River of Life which transforms the epitome of deadness- the Dead Sea- into a life giving reservoir is nothing less than Christ Himself! A little while later, Christ told the crowds:

John 7:38, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'"

One cannot miss it! Jesus is "the River" referenced in Ezekiel 47 — a river that enables that which is nourished by it to bear fruit regardless of the season of life! It was with this river that God encouraged the first generation of His people who entered exile.

Psalms 46:4-5, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved..."

Once again we have here a river flowing from the presence of God, just like in Genesis 2:10... Revelation 22... and Ezekiel 47!⁴ It was this river that was referenced and so promised to God's people in the Old Testament as they entered into "the valley of the shadow of death"!

Christian from all of this, do you understand. That which God supplies His children as they live as aliens and strangers in this world? That which only can satisfy you as you live your life in this age?

Get this! It is NOT the things that the worldling longs and looks for in life (these are but "broken cisterns that can hold no water"). RATHER, it is none-other and nothing less than Jesus Christ! I love the insight that J. M. Boice had in this regard in his commentary on Psalm 85:

The greatest of all mercies that we can receive from God is forgiveness of sins, and it is from this foundation that all other covenanted mercies flow. Yet how little we value it! If God gives us good health, a happy and supportive family, a good job, and praise from our employer and friends, we think we are blessed. If we lack any one of these things, we begin to suppose that God has somehow forgotten us or does not care. (Boice, 2005, pp. 696-697)

Hear this! The tendency in a land of wealth, is to mislabel, misidentify, and so misunderstand God's blessing! We think blessing is the best this world has to offer and when we are void of it, we consider ourselves slighted by God! Oh, how we must see that THE greatest blessing God could ever give to a mortal being is a taste from the River of Life, Jesus Christ! To have and hold this in our hands is to be rich indeed!

Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* IN CHRIST."

The blessings of God are all found "in Christ!" In fact, they are Christ! In this regard, consider our passage once again.

Ezekiel 47:9a, "And it will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live..."

Ezekiel 47:12, "And by the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all *kinds of trees* for food. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. [Why?] They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

Spiritual vitality does NOT come from feasting on Christ once a week, month, or year. Spiritual vitality comes as we swim in the waters of the Lord. In other words, as we immerse ourselves in Christ at all times!

How do we do that? By spending time with Christ in His word, in prayer, and in the Lord's Supper. By seeking from these means NOT a spiritual pick-me-up, BUT genuine fellowship and communion with the Lord! When this becomes our daily practice, our "leaves do not wither" and we "yield fruit in our lives regardless of the season"!

Psalms 1:1-3, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. [Notice what happens when he does this...] And he will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers."

The "prosperity" referenced here is NOT that of the world, BUT spiritual health, vitality, and growth in Christ! Jeremiah picking up on this, extended the same promise to his exiled brethren with a slight modification:

Jeremiah 17:7-8, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water [the Hebrew is 'transplanted' which is a beautiful description of salvation. So transplanted by the water of life by grace, notice

what he does...], that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.”

Brothers and sisters, let us affirm once again this day that everything this world has to offer by way of satisfaction and gifts are but “broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). Christ alone is all that your soul wants, desires, or needs!

This is why prayer-less and Bible-less Christians are such a contradiction. We have tasted of the water of life and have been saved. Yet now we choose to go without? And why is that? Because we think satisfaction can be found in what this world has to offer!

May God give us the grace to purpose this day to establish a daily practice of fellowshiping with Christ via His word. Other than coming to Christ, there is no more significant decision you could ever make!

There is one more application we must consider. Notice how the commentary God gave on Ezekiel 40-48 ends:

Revelation 22:17, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”

How does Revelation end? With the free-offer of the gospel to any who hear and are thirsty! So it is in our passage. Speaking of the sea whose waters were made fresh on account of the River of Life:

Ezekiel 47:11, “But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt.”

This is a shocking statement indicative of the world in which we live and the already/not yet coming of the Kingdom of God! How could so much be transformed, changed, and blessed by the River of Life, and yet “the swamp lands”- which typically are found by large bodies of water- remain untouched? Yet such is the case in the world in which we live! Our households have tasted the fresh waters of Christ unto our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace, yet our neighbors/family/friends remain untouched!

While we take from this and many other passages that it is God’s will to leave many untouched- “...they will be left for salt” (cf. Matthew 7:13-14)- nevertheless we know that our lives once resembled the swamp lands of this world, yet the river of life reached us! Christian, it is NOT ours to know what constitutes salt-water and what constitutes swamp-land. Ours is to bring the glorious news of the River of Life to this generation.

Revelation 22:17b, “...let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty

come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”

With that we are going to wrap up our study of this book. Yet as we do so, let me encourage you, there are more themes arising from Ezekiel 40-48 which could be examined and applied to our lives. It is my hope that this introduction has given you sufficient tools to study further this wonderful Old Testament epistle!

Works Cited

Boice, J. M. (2005). *Psalms: Psalms 42-106 (Expositional Commentary)*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books .

End Note(s)

¹ Ezekiel 40-48 is packed with such parallels. To name just a few, consider: (1) In Ezekiel 40:1-3 the prophet is taken to a high mountain and shown what looks to be a city. In Revelation 21:10, John is taken to a high mountain and shown the New Jerusalem. (2) In Ezekiel 40:3-42:20 an angelic figure measures the Temple. This parallels Revelation 21:15-17 where an angel measures the New Jerusalem. (3) In Ezekiel the prophet is told that the city is the dwelling place of God with his people [Ezekiel 43:7; 48:35], which parallels what John is told about the New Jerusalem [Revelation 21:3]. (4) The respective cities both have twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on them [Ezekiel 48:30-34; Revelation 21:12-13].

² This is another reason why we do not take this prophecy to be in reference to a literal temple. Where on Mount Mariah would a constant water supply come from? (2) Furthermore you will note that the course of the stream is unnatural. From Jerusalem it would flow down into the Kidron, up over the Mount of Olives, and then cross a series of valleys and mountain ranges before it reaches the Arabah.

³ The word is onomatopoeic- its sound is its definition, מִפְּכִיִּם (mepakim). To the OT Jew, that was the sound of the trickling of water from a container.

⁴ In this regard notice the purpose and point of this Psalm: It stresses the glorious consequences when God takes up His abode in the presence of His people. Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Once and again, this is the theme of Ezekiel 40-48, “...and the name of the city from *that day shall be*, ‘The Lord is there’” (Ezekiel 48:54b)