

**International Sunday School Lesson  
Study Notes  
November 16, 2014**

**Lesson Text: Ezekiel 47:1-12  
Lesson Title: A Transforming Stream**

**Introduction**

Rivers and sources of water have always been necessary to sustain life. Before man had the capability of pumping water and moving it into remote areas, cities, towns, and industries were built along the banks of rivers. Rivers and sources of water were also a vital part of biblical history and the history of God's people in the Old Testament. The first mention of a "river" is in Genesis 2:10 where a "river" watered the Garden of Eden. The last mention of a "river" is in Revelation 22:1-2 where John describes a "*pure river of water of life*" which will be part of the New Jerusalem in the new earth. In between those book ends of rivers are numerous biblical stories surrounding bodies of water.

In our lesson text today, Ezekiel describes for us a river that will flow from the millennial temple in the earthly Jerusalem. The psalmist spoke about this remarkable river in Psalm 46:4-5 as did the prophet Zechariah in Zechariah 14:8. The river Ezekiel saw will one day in the future millennial kingdom flow out from Jerusalem and divide into two branches, one streaming eastward toward the Dead Sea and the other streaming westward to the Mediterranean. This river, unlike so many others in the Promised Land, will not be subject to drying up in the summer. The waters of the new river Ezekiel saw will flow regardless of the season or situation. What great hope these words must have been for the captives in Babylon and for all, both Jew and Gentile who read these words today.

**The Origin of the Water (Ezekiel 47:1-2)**

Verse 1

"Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house *stood toward* the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south *side* of the altar."

Beginning in Ezekiel 40 and continuing to chapter 47 and verse 12, God gives the prophet Ezekiel a vision of the millennial kingdom, the millennial temple, and the millennial worship. One of the outstanding features of Ezekiel's vision of the millennial kingdom was of a life-giving river flowing from the temple. In the opening verses of Ezekiel 46, the prophet is taken to the outer court of the millennial temple. From there the angel brings him to the "door of the house"

or, sanctuary in Ezekiel 47. As Ezekiel stands there, at the door of the sanctuary, he sees “waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward.” “Issued” means “poured forth” indicating the water poured out from the inner heart of the temple. From there the water poured over the threshold of the door, down by the altar of sacrifice, finally reaching the parched desert and emptying into the Dead Sea.

Some commentators interpret this river as the ever increasing depths of spiritual blessings that flows from the presence of God. Certainly God’s blessings are like the ever deepening and ever widening characteristics of the river Ezekiel saw. However, there is nothing in the text that suggests Ezekiel had anything in mind other than a literal river flowing from the temple bringing new life and freshness to everything in its path.

“Afterward” is the time following Ezekiel’s tour of the kitchens in the temple complex recorded in chapter 46. Specifically, Ezekiel’s angelic tour guide had shown him the priest’s kitchen where the priest’s cooked the offerings and ate the portion allotted to them (Ezekiel 46:19-20). The guide had also show Ezekiel the kitchen’s for the sacrifices of the people where the people were allowed to eat the portion of the sacrifice in a fellowship meal (Ezekiel 46: 21-24; Leviticus 7:15-18). The temple was a place of fellowship as well as a place of worship.

It is “after” the tour of the temple kitchens that Ezekiel is “brought again unto the door of the house,” or of the temple. The “threshold of the house” is the temple porch. “Eastward” is the direction that the “forefront of the temple” faced. The “water” came out “from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.” That means the waters came out from the corner where the south wall of the porch and the east wall of the temple joined

### Verse 2

“Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side.”

Ezekiel followed his heavenly guide outside the inner and outer courts by “the way of the gate northward” or to the outer north gate of the temple. Upon reaching the north gate, Ezekiel’s guide turned “eastward” and moved round to the east outer gate. It was there that Ezekiel “beheld” or saw the “waters” running out “on the right side.”

### **The Expansion of the River (Ezekiel 47:3-6)**

### Verse 3

“And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters *were* to the ankles.”

Ezekiel’s guide continues to move “eastward.” He has a “line in his hand” which was some type of measuring stick. In Ezekiel 40:3, this measuring line is called a “*measuring reed*” possibly referring to a piece of flax. The guide “measured a thousand cubits” which is about 1,750 feet. The “cubit” here is the base measurement of about 18 inches.

His purpose in measuring is to reveal the depth and size of the river. Based on the guide’s first measurement, the depth of the river was “to the ankles,” or about 6 inches. When a man stands in ankle deep water he could feel the reality of the water and experience the soothing effect of the flow of water upon his feet.

#### Verse 4

“Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters *were* to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters *were* to the loins.”

“Again,” or after a second measurement of “a thousand” cubits, the “waters were to the knees.” “Brought me” means the guide is escorting Ezekiel into deeper waters. “Knee” deep water would be about a foot and a half, or 18 inches. When a man stands in knee deep water he could begin to sense the depth and may even begin to hear the movement. The water at this depth is starting to have an impact on his body.

From there, another “thousand” cubits were measured and the guide brought Ezekiel to “waters to the loins.” The “loins” of a man is a reference to the waist area which would be about 3 feet high on the average man. A man’s “loins” is where his strength is. When a man stands in waist deep water he can feel the force of the water starting to move him in a certain direction. Half of his body is now submerged under the influence of the waters force.

#### Verse 5

“Afterward he measured a thousand; *and it was* a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.”

After another measurement of “a thousand” cubits, the “river” had “risen” to the depth that now Ezekiel could “swim.” From a small trickle of water from under the altar at the temple to “a river that could not be passed over.” That

means the river is so deep you could not walk through it. When a man is in swimming deep water he is able to experience all that the river is.

There is something interesting about the expansion and increasing depth of this river. Rivers normally widen and deepen as the volume of water increases through tributaries, such as creeks and rain runoff pouring into them. But there is no such tributaries mentioned in the text. And yet this river becomes deeper and broader the farther it flows from its source. Is not this true of the river of God's grace? How small the things of God often begin and then God blesses and expands! The little trickles of God's grace can quickly become rivers of God's riches.

#### Verse 6

"And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen *this*? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river."

The heavenly guide asks Ezekiel, "Son of man, hast thou seen this?" Literally, he asked Ezekiel, "Did you see what happened to that little trickle of water that came out from under the temple?" The question is one of amazement.

"Then," or after the question, he "brought" Ezekiel "to the brink of the river" which refers to the bank of the river. A question might be raised here concerning the words "caused me to return." Return from where? Some suggest that Ezekiel was actually in the river but according to Ezekiel 40:2, the visions God was giving Ezekiel was while he was "*upon a very high mountain.*" From that vantage point of the mountain, the guide now causes Ezekiel to see this great river from the vantage point of the bank of the river.

#### **The Production from the River (Ezekiel 47:7-12)**

#### Verse 7

"Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river *were* very many trees on the one side and on the other."

Having brought the prophet back in vision to the bank of the river, the guide wants him to consider what he had seen and experienced. Then as Ezekiel continued to gaze he saw that upon the banks of the river many trees appearing on both sides of the river. It is possible that these "trees" had been there all along but that Ezekiel attention had not been directed toward them until now.

#### Verse 8

“Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: *which being* brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.”

The heavenly guide explained to Ezekiel that the “waters issued” out of the temple and go “toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea.” The “east country” in this case is probably the region about Jordan just above the Dead Sea. “Down into the desert” is the barren valley near Jericho. The “sea” is obviously a reference to the Dead Sea.

When the waters of Ezekiel’s river arrive at the Dead Sea, “the waters shall be healed.” Presently, the Dead Sea is known as death waters. The water in the Dead Sea is 6 times more salty than the ocean. There is no way life can be supported there because of the existing mineral content.

When the “waters” of the river that flows out of the temple reaches the Dead Sea, the “waters” of the Dead Sea will “be healed,” or made fresh. The word “healed” is the Hebrew word, *raphe* {raw-faw}. It means “to make healthy and to remove the hurts.”

#### Verse 9

“And it shall come to pass, *that* every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”

As Ezekiel looked he saw that when the waters of this river poured into the Dead Sea they brought life and healing. A “multitude” of living things swarmed into the sea and great schools “of fish” were seen where before there had been only death and desolation. And all this was because “these waters shall come thither.” We are told that, “every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”

Commenting on this verse, Doctor G. Campbell Morgan writes, “The new order is established; the Temple is built, and its services are arranged; the city is established around it; the land is apportioned in relation to it; Jehovah has returned to dwell among His people; His will is administered by a Prince upon the basis of redemption. All is completed. Now the river of life flows forth from that House, and so from that Divine Presence; it comes by the way of the altar; it proceeds to the wilderness; it flows into the Dead Sea; and in its progress there is life, “every thing shall live whither the river cometh.” That is the life of restoration. For that which is desolate because reprobate, there is no other way of recovery, of restoration. But there is this way, because of the character and nature of God. The end is not yet. The wilderness is still barren; the sea is dead; but the river is flowing out from the Sanctuary by the way of the altar;

and the “seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord” are assured, because He will “send the Christ, even Jesus,” for the “restoration of all things.”

#### Verse 10

“And it shall come to pass, *that* the fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi even unto Eneglaim; they shall be a *place* to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.”

Because the river has brought healing and life, “fishers shall stand upon it,” or by it from “Engedi” which is on the west bank of the Dead Sea “even unto Eneglaim,” which is possibly the northwestern extremity of the Dead Sea. These fishers are spreading their nets, taking fish of every kind, furnishing abundant food for untold thousands of people. The river is working!

#### Verse 11

“But the miry places thereof and the marishes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.”

For whatever reasons the “miry places” and “the marishes” will not experience the healing power of the river. Why? There are two possible answers. First, the swamps and marshes could supply salt for the temple offerings, as well as for food (Ezekiel 43:24). Second, these places unaffected by the river could serve as a reminder to God’s people of the blessing of the river God has miraculously given.

#### Verse 12

“And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.”

The previous verses have spoken to us of the *beginning of the river* and the *bounty from the river*. Verse 12 speaks to us of the *beauty of the river*. The words of this verse, “trees...leaf...not fade...fruit...new fruit...and leaf for medicine” stirs the heart of the reader.

The “fruit” growing from the water of the river is for food and the “leaves” serve a medicinal purpose, probably both in preventative and corrective purposes. Hallelujah there’s a remedy in the river! The “fruit” is perpetual, kept so by a continual and lavish supply of spring water from the temple. Simply amazing!

As we read of trees for food “whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail, and bring forth new fruit every month,” it is both promising and refreshing. As in the case of the tree of life as seen in Revelation 22:2, who can measure the blessing that will come to this world and to mankind as a whole because of the river of life that shall yet flow forth from the throne of God.

## **Conclusion**

God is the ultimate giver and restorer of life, as seen in Ezekiel’s vision of the river of life flowing from His throne. This recurring image in prophecy can also be found in Revelation 22:1–2. In those verses, the “*river of the water of life*” flows from God’s throne and is lined by trees, the leaves of which bring healing to the nations, exactly as seen in Ezekiel. The water’s main properties are that it heals and gives life, suggesting a renewal of the physical creation as well as spiritual vitality.

Obviously Ezekiel’s vision of the river is to be understood as prophecy concerning coming blessings in the future. So, what does Ezekiel’s visions of the temple river mean to us today? To the unsaved, Jesus Christ Himself is the Living Water to all who will come and drink. To the woman at Jacob’s well in John 4:14, Jesus said, “*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*” Come to the river of life and receive salvation that will never fail.

To the believer, you can enjoy the fullness of Jesus Christ and all His blessing right now through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. You don’t have to wait until the millennial Kingdom to know the fullness of life. Jesus said, “*He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:38).

Amen.