

Unit III: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

Hope Floats

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 7:9-17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 47:1-12

PRINT PASSAGE: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

KEY VERSE

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. (Ezekiel 47:12, KJV)

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“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.” (Ezekiel 47:12, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Explore the hope that God offered in the renewal of creation.
- Embrace hope as God’s gift for all circumstances.
- Testify to having hope in God by loving your neighbors.

*Key Terms

Cross (verse 5)—Hebrew: *abar* (aw-bar'): to go or pass through; to transition; “pass over” (KJV).

Cubits (verse 3)—Hebrew: *ammah* (am-maw'): measures of length based on the forearm.

Loins (verse 4)—Hebrew: *mothan* (mo'-then): the two sides of the back; hips; “waist” (NIV).

Measured (verse 4)—Hebrew: *madad* (maw-dad'): stretched; extended; surveyed.

Temple (verse 1)—Hebrew: *bayith* (bah'-yith): household; dwelling; a “house” (KJV).

Water(s) (verse 1)—Hebrew: *mayim* (mah'-yim): of a river; juice(s); pool(s); flood(s).



The Biblical Context

Ezekiel received this profound vision during a critical period when the Israelites were enduring the hardships of Babylonian Exile, a time marked by deep spiritual distress and a sense of dislocation from their homeland. The majestic Temple in Jerusalem, once the heart of their worship and the dwelling place of God's presence, lay in utter ruin, leading many of God's people to grapple with despair and the nagging question of whether restoration and hope were ever possible.

This particular passage is situated in the final segments of Ezekiel's prophetic writings, specifically chapters 40–48, which collectively offer an elaborate and symbolic vision of renewal focusing on the reconstruction of the Temple. At the center of this vision is a detailed description of a newly established temple, which serves as a representation of restored worship and divine communion.

One of the most striking elements of Ezekiel's vision is the imagery of flowing waters that emerge from the temple, symbolizing God's life-giving and transformative presence. As these waters course outward, they not only signify spiritual renewal but also reflect the tangible impact of God's influence on the land and its inhabitants. For the people of ancient Palestine, a region characterized by its arid landscape where fresh water was scarce and vital for survival, this imagery would have resonated deeply. It encapsulated the essential nature of water as a life-sustaining resource, thus enhancing the significance of the vision.

The dynamic progression of the waters—beginning as a mere trickle and culminating in a powerful river, serves as a potent metaphor for the expanding reach of God's healing presence. As the waters grow in volume and strength, they are depicted as bringing life and rejuvenation to the surroundings, transforming barren land into a flourishing ecosystem. This vivid transformation symbolizes not just the physical restoration of the land but also the spiritual renewal of God's people, reinforcing the hope that despite their current exiled condition, divine grace and vital renewal would ultimately prevail.

Way (verse 2, KJV)—Hebrew: *derek* (deh'-rek): road; journey; manner; conduct; course of life; mode of action; walk; path; example.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

The effects of environmental injustice, health disparities, and spiritual drought disproportionately impact African American neighborhoods. Many have seen once-vibrant areas decline, much like dried-up streams in a parched land. Yet, just as the ancestors found strength and hope in the waters of baptism and drew courage from hymns like “Wade in the Water,” Ezekiel's vision of healing waters flowing from the temple speaks powerfully to our contemporary experience. This prophecy points to God's promise of restoration, not just for individual souls, but for entire communities. The prophet Ezekiel's ancient vision connects to the modern struggle for spiritual renewal, environmental justice, and community healing, offering hope and direction for those seeking to be agents of God's restorative work in our world.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Source of Living Waters (Ezekiel 47:1-2)

KJV

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.

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.

NIV

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.

The vision opens in verse 1 as Ezekiel returns to the temple entrance, where he witnesses water flowing from beneath the threshold of God's house toward the east. This positioning carries deep spiritual significance in understanding God's plan for renewal. Verse 1 specifically notes that the waters came from below the temple's right side, traditionally associated with strength and favor in Hebrew culture, suggesting God's deliberate blessing in this divine initiative. The detail in verse 1 about the water running down from the right side of the house, south of the altar, emphasizes the connection between worship, sacrifice, and spiritual renewal. We see the guide leading Ezekiel through the outer gate on the east, then around to the outer gate facing east, where he observes the water trickling out from the south side. This careful positioning and movement in verse 2 demonstrates how God's presence moves methodically from the place of worship into the broader world, prompting consideration of how churches may serve as conduits of divine grace to surrounding communities.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does the physical flow of water from the temple mirror how God's presence should flow from places of worship into communities?

The Deepening Journey (Ezekiel 47:3-6)

KJV

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.

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.

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.

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.

NIV

3 As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits 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.

In verse 3, we see the beginning of a series of systematic measurements as the guide—often interpreted as a divine presence—leads Ezekiel eastward. With a measuring line in hand, the guide marks off a distance of a thousand cubits, gently introducing Ezekiel to the experience of ankle-deep water. This initial depth serves as a metaphor for the first tentative steps of faith, reflecting how believers often start their spiritual journeys. It is a stage where one is still very much in control, able to stand and walk, representing the initial willingness to engage with God.

As we move to verse 4, the guide measures another thousand cubits, leading Ezekiel into knee-deep waters. This deeper level signifies a commitment that requires more from the individual, highlighting a transition from mere participation to a more profound submission to God’s greater purposes. This stage symbolizes the gradual deepening of faith—inviting a level of vulnerability and trust that goes beyond the surface. Continuing in verse 5, after yet another measurement of a thousand cubits, Ezekiel finds himself in waist-deep water. This represents a pivotal moment of surrender, where one must give up control and fully rely on God’s plan. It is a significant step in the journey of faith, marking a readiness to embrace the transformative experience that comes from having a closer relationship with God.

Finally, verses 5-6 describe the moment when the guide measures once more, and the water transforms into a river that is far too deep to cross by walking—one must swim. This moment signifies complete reliance on God’s sustaining power and grace. The emphasis that this river cannot be crossed underscores the immense and overwhelming nature of God’s grace—grace that moves beyond personal capabilities into a realm of divine abundance. Notably, this progression of deepening waters occurs without any external sources contributing to the river’s flow. This detail highlights a vital truth: spiritual growth and deepening faith are nurtured solely through the grace of God. It serves as a reminder that the journey is sustained not by human efforts, but by the unmerited favor and love poured out by God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which stage of the water’s depth best describes your current spiritual journey, and what would it take to move to the next level?

The Promise of Restoration (Ezekiel 47:7-9, 12)

KJV

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.

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.

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.

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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.

NIV

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, 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."

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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."

In verse 7, Ezekiel notices the abundant trees lining both banks of the river—a powerful image of flourishing life. Verse 8 specifies that these waters flow toward the eastern region, descending into the Arabah (Jordan Valley) before entering the Dead Sea, where verse 9 reveals the miraculous transformation of salt water into fresh water. The emphasis in verse 9 on the multitude of living creatures that will thrive wherever the river flows speaks to God's power to bring life to seemingly hopeless situations. The prophecy specifically notes that when these waters enter the stagnant waters, they become fresh—a powerful metaphor for divine intervention in our most challenging circumstances. Verse 12 returns to the trees along the banks, describing fruit trees whose leaves will not wither and whose fruit will not fail. The monthly fruiting cycle

mentioned in verse 12 represents supernatural abundance, while the healing properties of the leaves suggest God's provision for both sustenance and healing. This verse concludes by explaining that this extraordinary fertility comes because the water flows from the sanctuary, reinforcing the connection between divine presence and lasting transformation.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What “dead seas” in your life or community need the touch of these healing waters, and how might God be calling you to be part of that transformation?

A Closing Thought

This vision calls for looking beyond current circumstances to God's promise of comprehensive restoration. The waters flowing from God's presence illustrate that true personal, communal, or environmental healing begins with spiritual renewal. African American believers have a long tradition of seeing God's hand at work in bringing life from death, hope from despair, and justice from oppression. This passage is an invitation to rise as both recipients and channels of God's restorative power in our world.

Your Life

Consider how you can be a conduit of God's healing waters daily. This might mean advocating for environmental justice in your neighborhood, supporting community restoration projects, or simply being a source of encouragement and hope to those around you. Let your life be like those trees planted by the water, consistently bearing fruit and offering healing to others through your words and actions.

Your World!

Share your story of how God's healing waters have transformed your life. Use this vision of restoration to encourage others who feel overwhelmed by personal or community challenges. Help them see that as these waters grow progressively deeper, God's work in their lives and communities may start small but grow increasingly powerful as they continue to walk in faith.

Closing Prayer

Lord, make us channels of Your healing waters, bringing restoration and hope to our communities. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Please be prepared for next week's lesson. The lesson topic for Sunday, December 7, 2025, is “A Life Map.” The Devotional Reading is Psalm 119:105-112, the Background Scriptures are Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 1:8-9; 2 Kings 22:8-20; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Psalm 19:7-14; Luke 24:25-32; Acts 17:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:14-17, and the Print Passages are Psalm 19:7-13; 2 Timothy 3:14-17.