

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Ezekiel 47:1-12

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 16, 2014

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 16, 2014**, is from **Ezekiel 47:1-12**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Ezekiel 47:1-12

(Ezekiel 47:1) Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

God's people never built a temple, not even their second temple, according to the vision and building plans that God gave Ezekiel. The people and their leaders did not believe Jeremiah or Ezekiel until after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians according to their predictions. Tradition says that Jeremiah was martyred for his faith in God and his continual calling of the people to repent of their sins and turn back to the true God. Jesus said the prophets were sent by God to warn the people of God's judgment and the need for them to repent of their sins to escape judgment; but instead of repenting, they killed God's prophets (see Matthew 23:29-39). If this vision is literally fulfilled, it will be fulfilled in the future, but see the Book of Revelation 22:1-7.

(Ezekiel 47:2) Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side.

Since the east gate was closed, the angel brought Ezekiel out of the north gate and around so he could see the water coming out of the south side of the temple area. This water would become the great River of God that would flow from God in the direction that God determined it would flow. Jesus said He would provide streams of living water that would flow out of the believer's heart where the Holy Spirit would dwell (see the Gospel of John 4:10-14 and 7:37-39).

(Ezekiel 47:3) Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep.

The water began as a small, shallow stream from one source and that source was God. As the stream became a river, the water deepened, but no other water entered the river from any outside source; the water only came from God. In nature, streams become rivers as more streams pour into them, but that is not the case with the River of God. God can do great things from small beginnings; such as Jesus' disciples spreading the gospel around the world and our faith deepening as we prayerfully study the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit.

(Ezekiel 47:4) Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist.

Ezekiel walked along with the angel as he measured the depth of the water with his body: ankle-deep, knee-deep, and waist-deep. As the River of God flowed from the temple, Ezekiel enjoyed the refreshing water until it became too deep for him to walk within it. We can understand much truth as we read the Scriptures, but at certain points God's truth is over our heads.

(Ezekiel 47:5) Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed.

At some point in our study of the Bible, of God, and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the truth of God becomes so deep that the clear meaning is beyond both our heads and our hearts; therefore, we must continue to swim in faith based on the truths we know from the Bible. God will help us keep our heads above the water. The Holy Spirit and Bible teachers can take us a long way in our study of the Scriptures, but at some point we must wait and mature to learn more of what God has to teach us; some truths we will only understand given more study, more time, more obedience, and more experience.

(Ezekiel 47:6) He said to me, “Mortal, have you seen this?” Then he led me back along the bank of the river.

Since the man or angel knew the limits of Ezekiel’s human endurance (even his endurance in the midst of a vision), he led him out of the water and they walked along the bank to learn more about God and what the River of God would accomplish as it flowed. Though the gospel of Jesus Christ has spread worldwide, the gospel is still accomplishing more of what God intended and we can observe God’s work from the bank when we cannot be directly involved under God’s leadership.

(Ezekiel 47:7) As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other.

Trees naturally grow and flourish near well-watered areas such as streams, rivers, and lakes. The River of God gives life and growth. Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a tree that grows larger and larger and provides a home for more and more believers (see Matthew 13:31-32). If we remain in the Word of God and stay close to God as we follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will be like flourishing green trees that will produce much fruit to the glory of God and for the benefit of others.

(Ezekiel 47:8) He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh.

The River of Life flowed through the desert (the Arabah) to the Dead Sea. In his vision, the River of God turned the Dead Sea into fresh water. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He gave her spiritual water; she came to new life when she believed the truth of God about Jesus the Messiah, and her testimony led many in her town to believe in Jesus too (John 4:23-26; 39-42). If we neglect the study of the Word of God, we will become spiritually stagnant, and only the Word of God and Spirit of God can refresh us.

(Ezekiel 47:9) Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes.

Wherever the River of God goes it brings life. The fresh water of God purified the stagnant water and made life possible for many fish. Those Ezekiel spoke to in exile would have remembered the Dead Sea, and they might have been encouraged to learn that God had not abandoned them, but God would give them new life and they would prosper again someday. We do not know how many only thought in material terms with regard to material prosperity and how many gave a more spiritual meaning to Ezekiel’s words. We do know that God has the power to transform the Dead Sea and bring those who are dead to life; just as Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and God the Father

raised Jesus from the dead. By the grace of God in this life, the gospel of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit give spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead.

(Ezekiel 47:10) People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-gedi to Englaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.

In his vision, the River of God brought many kinds of fish to life in the Dead Sea, as many different kinds of fish as in the Mediterranean Sea. These fish would provide food for fishermen and their families. God intends for His Word to meet the needs of those who need life. Believers from many different backgrounds who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word will become a part of His body, the church, and inherit the Kingdom of God. In his vision, fishermen work in the Kingdom of God; they fish for food. Jesus promised, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Matthew 4:19).

(Ezekiel 47:11) But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt.

God will keep the River of Life within its proper banks or boundaries. Salt is needed as well as water by all animals and people. Since God created us, knows us perfectly, and knows our needs, God will graciously provide for us all that we need for life and health, both physical and spiritual. Many things we will need in the future will only be provided by God in the future as we need them.

(Ezekiel 47:12) On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."

God has provided animal life and plant life for beauty and food. The River of Life or the River of God keeps the trees ever-green; just as the truth of God and the Spirit of God keep believers spiritually alive. God will provide all that we need forever. God will provide what we need to sustain us, and if we need healing then He will heal us (if not in this life, then in the next life); just as Jesus healed every disease brought to Him and raised people from the dead – even as the River of Life in Ezekiel's vision raised the Dead Sea to new life and brought new life to fish, trees, and those on its banks.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Do you know of any other interpretations of Ezekiel's temple and river than the ones discussed in this lesson?
2. How is Ezekiel 47:1 and Revelation 22:1 different?
3. How does the river in Ezekiel differ from natural rivers and streams?
4. What was the most important part of Ezekiel's vision to you?
5. In what way is Ezekiel 47:12 similar to Revelation 22:2?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

— © Copyright 2014 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.