

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Ezekiel 47:13-23

New American Standard Bible

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, November 23, 2014

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The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 23, 2014**, is from **Ezekiel 47:13-23**. **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 47:13-23

(Ezekiel 47:13) Thus says the Lord GOD, “This *shall be* the boundary by which you shall divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel; Joseph *shall have* two portions.

In Ezekiel 47:13-20, Ezekiel received instructions on how the Promised Land should be divided among the 12 tribes after they returned from exile. The Levites received some cities, a portion of the offerings, and lived among the other 12 tribes: Joseph’s descendants had been divided into two tribes, leaving 12 tribes to inherit the land. Since the returning exiles did not obey the vision that God gave Ezekiel, they did not divide the land according to Ezekiel’s vision either.

(Ezekiel 47:14) “You shall divide it for an inheritance, each one equally with the other; for I swore to give it to your forefathers, and this land shall fall to you as an inheritance.

Since the Judeans had been sent into exile partly because of their dishonesty and stealing from others, God commanded them to divide the land equally when they returned from exile. Repeatedly, the LORD commanded through Ezekiel, “you shall,” but the returning exiles did not obey Ezekiel’s vision. If they had begun to obey God in rebuilding the temple according to God’s specifications, then God would have helped them obey Him in all things and God would have also given them more specific

specifications as needed. God wanted them to treat one another equally or justly, including how property would be inherited in the future. Remember, because he obeyed God's command, Jeremiah had bought land before the Judeans were taken into captivity with the promise from God that the land would be inherited by his descendants after their time of captivity ended and they returned to the Promised Land.

(Ezekiel 47:15) “*This shall be the boundary of the land: on the north side, from the Great Sea by the way of Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad;*

The Great Sea was the Mediterranean Sea. We cannot say with certainty the locations of many of the other places in Ezekiel's vision. The people in exile must have been encouraged to learn from Ezekiel that God intended for them to have a new temple, His presence with them in their new temple, and land given proportionally for their homes when He permitted them and enabled them to return from exile to the Promised Land.

(Ezekiel 47:16) **Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer-hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran.**

God gave detailed visions to Ezekiel that the people of Ezekiel's day would have understood geographically and mathematically, though these place names remain obscure today.

(Ezekiel 47:17) “*The boundary shall extend from the sea to Hazar-enan at the border of Damascus, and on the north toward the north is the border of Hamath. This is the north side.*

God gave Ezekiel boundaries for the 12 tribes that included borders on the north, south, east, and west. Damascus was the capital city of Syria and was a well-known city even in the days of Abraham.

(Ezekiel 47:18) “*The east side, from between Hauran, Damascus, Gilead and the land of Israel, shall be the Jordan; from the north border to the eastern sea you shall measure. This is the east side.*

Originally, the name Gilead applied to lands occupied by the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh.

(Ezekiel 47:19) “*The south side toward the south shall extend from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook of Egypt and to the Great Sea. This is the south side toward the south.*

The south border was the border with Egypt.

(Ezekiel 47:20) “The west side *shall be* the Great Sea, from the *south* border to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This is the west side.

The West border was the Mediterranean Sea.

(Ezekiel 47:21) “So you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel.

Though the Assyrians had destroyed the Northern Kingdom and had dispersed the 10 northern tribes in 722 BC, and though the Babylonians had destroyed the Southern Kingdom and had dispersed the remaining Judeans to Babylon in 597 BC and 586 BC, Ezekiel’s vision included providing land for returning exiles from all the 12 tribes of Israel. Ezekiel’s vision was one of hope, because God would enable His people to do what He commanded when they returned from exile, and God could arrange for representatives from all 12 tribes to be present when the land was divided.

(Ezekiel 47:22) “You shall divide it by lot for an inheritance among yourselves and among the aliens who stay in your midst, who bring forth sons in your midst. And they shall be to you as the native-born among the sons of Israel; they shall be allotted an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.

The land divisions were to be an inheritance for the descendants of each of the 12 tribes. Ezekiel’s vision distinguished between “foreigners” and “aliens.” “Foreigners” were “uncircumcised in heart and flesh,” and they joined with the rebellious house of Israel to perform abominations (see Ezekiel 44:4-14). “Aliens” were those who had converted to Judaism, perhaps even as Ezekiel ministered to Judean exiles, Babylonians, and others. God wanted Gentiles who had converted to Judaism to be treated equal to natural born Israelites in all of the 12 tribes of Israel. These Gentile converts to Judaism were to have the same rights of inheritance, property, and other legal protections as the Israelites. Later, the Apostle Paul would insist that Jewish converts and Gentile converts to Christianity should have equal rights, because they were all one in Christ Jesus.

(Ezekiel 47:23) “And in the tribe with which the alien stays, there you shall give *him* his inheritance,” declares the Lord GOD.

As Ezekiel’s vision indicates, certain responsibilities fell to certain tribes and limits were placed upon some in these tribes. For example, Levites could be servants in the temple in certain areas, but only those in the family of Zadok could draw near to God (Ezekiel 44:15-16). With respect to legal rights to land and inheritance, Gentile converts to Judaism were to be treated equal to the natural born Israelites. As far as we know, Jews and Gentiles only treated each other equally after they believed the good news of Jesus Christ and became a part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think God gave boundaries to the 12 tribes of Israel?
2. Since the Israelites often did not do what God told them to do, why do you think God included sins of omission in the Bible?
3. Why do you think Ezekiel's vision from God included such detailed instructions for building a new temple and dividing the land?
4. What is the difference between a foreigner in Israel and an alien in Israel?
5. Why do you think it was difficult for the Jews in the early church to treat the Gentiles in the early church with Christian respect and the quality?

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

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