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# Where Are We Going?

## Ezekiel 47:1 – 48:35

**Introduction** Are we there yet?! How much longer?! I'm bored! How long has it been?! I've gotta go to the bathroom!! As we approach vacation season, these announcements are frequently echoed in many a family vehicle. We often feel this same impatience in our life's journey. Looking for relief from misery, boredom, loneliness, and pain, we desire something more, something different. Couldn't today be a day of spiritual breakthrough? Couldn't tomorrow be one of new beginning? Couldn't my burden be lifted and a vision of glory rush in to fill my sense of emptiness and exhaustion? Could my fears really be changed to victory?

But instead we walk on, plodding mercilessly forward. We tread through this often barren desert-like life. We continue on with this caravan over this wasteland without any apparent oasis in sight! Our Bible studies and preaching can have this character as well. What's the big idea? What's the purpose of all this babbling? Are we close yet?!

We began this expedition into Ezekiel with a sermon from I Peter 2:9-11. We were confronted with the idea that as God's chosen people we are aliens and strangers in this world, never belonging, never content. We are exiles longing for home. In Hebrews we find a similar idea in chapter 11, verses 8-10 where Abraham is described as wandering, looking for a city. He could have settled in cities. It wasn't that cities were unavailable or yet to be discovered or built. But the city he longed for was designed and built by God. Why would he search for such a place? What would be so special about this type of dwelling that one would be willing to continue to wander, to live in tents and to never call a place "home?"

I laughed at Russ when he announced he was preaching through Ezekiel. I had my own fears of Ezekiel, its strange images, strange stories, strange lessons how can anyone make real sense of its message? Someone even asked Russ if he had planned on committing pulpit suicide! But we found at the end of this journey, a small excursion to help us on the greater journey of our lives, a clear view of the gospel, the power to change our lives.

We saw God's glory, His wonder, His splendor. We were able to have a glimpse of the power of His throne and its attendants. We were appalled at the representation of rebellion. We were sickened at the portrayal of sin without its coverings, without its trappings to make it socially acceptable. We couldn't leave without its shame being heaped upon our own consciences. But to top this off, we then heard clearly the pronouncement of judgment, of God's righteousness justice being carried out cleanly, perfectly with surgical precision. A precision more exact than anything the U.S. military can muster. Then we saw the grace of God explode upon us in images of restoration and revival. God himself builds his temple and erects his city for those whom He calls his own. All of this so that Ezekiel's readers would know, and have no doubt, that He and He alone is God.

So how does Ezekiel bring all this to closure? How do these last chapters close this journey and does it give us any power in our lives' journeys? Let's look at these last two chapters to excavate its message and bring to conclusion this fascinating and exhilaration journey through Ezekiel.

## **Living Water Project**

**(47: 1-12)**

We need to read these words with the same open-mindedness that we read other images found in this book. These are word pictures, much like ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics where the message is conveyed in symbols rather than letters and words. The key to interpreting these images is not left to our imagination. We do not have to search for some hidden clues to give us some coded meaning. The New Testament gives us often amazingly clear figures to grasp the meaning. Ezekiel has just finished displaying the wonder of reclamation and restoration by exposing us to images of a renewed Temple and temple worship. These images we clearly recognize as being fulfilled in Christ, our perfect sacrifice and the interface where God and his people can be reconciled. We now transition to an image of a river that flows from the temple, what could this mean for God's people in God's program?

### **The Exit of the River**

**(v.1-3)**

Instead of the brazen Sea on Solomon's temple the image is transformed into a moving river. The Sea was intended for cleansing, literally and symbolically. It stood before the door to the temple after the altar. The differences are not subtle. The water is alive, it is moving. It has "power" in and of itself. It is moving outward from God's presence, toward the people to meet them and their situations and difficulties. It finds its exit from the temple itself and derived from the ministry and power it represented.

### **The Expanse of the River**

**(v.4-6)**

These verses demonstrate the amazing growth of the river as it leaves the temple. At first perhaps a small trickle, not much to call a river, but eventually becomes an expanse that cannot be crossed. This growing of this stream is in itself a wonder with meaning so that the guide makes sure that Ezekiel recognizes what he has seen.

### **The Effect of the River**

**(v.7-12)**

Next, we are told what would be the effects of this flood. It would refresh the desert, bring trees of abundant fruit and be teeming with fish. The fruit from the trees would bring healing and satisfaction to their weariness and pain.

For the exiles hearing this from Ezekiel there would be hope of newness, freshness and plenty. They would have been reminded of the rivers flowing from the heart of Eden the garden of God. They would remember the barrenness of the desert of their homeland as it was laid desolate by its Babylonian invaders. They would be mindful of the expanse of desert that lie between their location and the glories that could only be found "at home." And again they would see the source of their blessing as cen-

tered in the God of the Temple who meets with them as they are cleansed through its ministries. They can only meet with God in the context of atonement and washing. But flowing from that ministry are the blessings of abundance and healing. This healing is not just from the effects of sin but from the rebellion and sin itself.

Jesus himself used this water picture many times. In John 4:7-14 he points to himself as the source of living water that will eternally quench her thirst.

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Later in John 7 we see Jesus' own interpretation of this metaphor. (Read John 7:37-39)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' " Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The work of the Holy Spirit, growing, always satisfying is the reality behind this image of water. It has its source in God, through the Son who makes our communion with the Father possible and is perpetuated by our own lives and works.

And the apostle John continues this theme by recording his vision of the consummation a new image of a river in the city of glory in Revelation 22 1-5.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

## **Homeland Security**

**(47:13 – 48:29)**

The exiles are now given a vision of their promised land and inheritance. They are shown the home to which they will return. The borders and sense of "division" capture the same images that Moses was given as to the allotment of the land, images that they would easily understand.

## The Dimensions of the Land

(47:13-20)

The land they would be possessing has essentially the same borders and limits as that promised to Abraham. It is the nearly the same as promised to the Israelites by Moses, but is more extensive than ever actually possessed by the nation.

## The Division of the Land

(47: 21- 48: 29)

This section after an introduction found in verses 21-23 of chapter 47, is arranged in symmetry, a chiasitic structure with the position of the city and temple shown in its center. The land is complete with each tribe included and also is extended to “aliens” who have joined in the true worship of God in this setting.

The exiles again would have been excited to hear of the restoration of their land to the glory that was promised to them through the Patriarchs. The land represented their identity, their home. We understand this even today when we ask someone where they are from. Possession of the land for the Israelite amounted to a completion or satisfaction of a debt. It signified an end to wandering, strife and turmoil.

Jesus sees this “rest” as having its fulfillment in himself. In Matthew 11: 28 he announces for all who are weary to come to him for rest. The author of Hebrews elaborates on this as well in chapter 4:1-11:

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ”

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

We must see this “land” as inheritance as our inheritance that we find in Christ as our redeemer and king.

## Sights of the City

(48:30-35)

These last few verses return our thoughts to that of this great city. This is in a very real sense a strange way to end this collection of oracles, but yet is quite appropriate. We see in this final description a concluding sense of perfection.

## **Its Perfect Symmetry**

**(v.30-34)**

The first things we are pointed to are the exit gates of the city and their perfect symmetry and proportion. We have been impressed with the plan and patterns of this great city all along and even the final description details the evenness and solidness of this design.

## **Its Perfect Name**

**(v.35)**

But the book ends with this final statement regarding the name of the city. Remember that in antiquity the name of a place or person was often connected to some meaning. It was a connection to some additional reality about a place. The patriarchs often named towns and locations by the events that occurred there. So it is not to be taken lightly that this city has a name. This name is special, it describes the purpose and reality of the city.

The exiles would have been relieved to hear the name of this special city of God's ministry. Jesus came to bring us the good things we already are now experiencing. We do not have access to God and purity of conscience through the old ways of external rituals and sacred tents or temples. Instead we are His people because of who Christ is and what He has done. Let's expand on this image a bit further as well.

Hebrews 11:8-10 speaks of Abraham's journey for a city:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Notice the themes of inheritance, promise, and foreign. But he looked for a city. He looked for a city that was being built by God. Keep in mind that the idea of city is not so much the buildings and structures as such but is the people and community that a "city" represents. It is a particular group of people, identified by common protection, government and place. When we turn to another passage we see more in this image.

I Peter 2:4-10 also speaks of a special city:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
 a cornerstone chosen and precious,  
 and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."  
 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,  
 The stone that the builders rejected  
 has become the cornerstone,"<sup>1</sup>  
 and

A stone of stumbling,  
 and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his

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marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter is speaking of a stone in the city of Zion laid as the cornerstone. The city built by God. A city built of living stones of whom the corner, the foundation, the ground, the substance without which the building fails and crumbles is Jesus himself. But verse 9 goes on and reinforces the idea that this city is one of people, now God's own people, even though, as verse 10 points out we were not his people, we have become his people because of his mercy.

But let's look at one further glorious text in Revelation 21:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (*This is from Ezekiel 11:20*) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

This city is also called "the bride" in verse 2 (and in verses 9,10). But also note the voice, "the dwelling of God is with man!" God is there! This city, these people, are now his people, they now will perfectly know him as their God. The chapter goes on and elaborates on its perfection in symmetry and glory. But the glory of the city, (of the people) is because God is there!

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## Conclusion

Let me bring this to some conclusions.

Ezekiel ends where he has been taking us all along. We will know that “I am the Lord” that Yahweh is the ruler, the victor, “the Lord.” We truly know Him when we are in perfect relationship with Him, in perfect communion with him, when we can be called “his people.”

At the beginning of this sermon we asserted that Ezekiel is a gospel, a presentation of the good news, indeed even the good news found in Christ. Early in the text we heard oracles of judgment. We heard messages of justice, power, and vengeance. All of this was so that we would know that “he was the Lord.” Let’s look at Ezekiel 5:13 to support this idea:

“Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the LORD—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them. Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by. You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the LORD, I have spoken—when I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread. I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”

And a cursory glance at Ezekiel 36 supports the change that God’s mercy and grace brings about. Verse 23, “I will vindicate my name”, verses 25,26, “I will cleanse you, I will give you a new heart.” And it continues in verses 27,28 “I will cause you to walk in my statutes...and dwell in the land...be my people and I will be your God.”

Can we find faith to trust in Christ as our all in all? Are we looking to him and him alone for the power to walk in him in his statutes? Are we filled with the vision of his glory that gives us the hope to endure and the strength to persevere?

Christ is our temple and atonement before God, our only access to this relationship. Christ is our possession and our hope! He is where we are going! He is what enables us to be his temple! He is how we are placed in his “city” as his people!

Are you trusting him each day for the security that he gives? Do you know that he is the Lord?

Are you trusting him each day for the strength that he gives to run the race, face the obstacles and find the victory in life’s trials? Do you know that he is the Lord?

Are you trusting him for the grace to change your rebellious heart, to melt it and bring you to him for an inheritance that is forever, perfect, glorious and in the presence of our wonderful and merciful God? Do you know that he is the Lord? The wonder will be that God himself is there!

