

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Water Lording” 47:1-23

The annual Feast of Tabernacles was the most joyous on Israel’s calendar. Alfred Edersheim writes,

It fell on a time of year when the hearts of the people would naturally be full of thankfulness, gladness, and expectancy. All the crops had been long stored; and now all fruits were also gathered, the vintage past, and the land only awaited the softening and refreshment of the 'latter rain,' to prepare it for a new crop.

One of the chief features of the feast was that the people would construct temporary shelters from branches of trees and move outdoors for seven days. It caused families to look back to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and their subsequent wandering in the wilderness for forty years when Israel lived in tents and worshiped at the Tabernacle (which was also a tent).

One special characteristic of the Feast of Tabernacles was the pouring of a vessel of water into a basin that was located at the base of the altar. First the golden vessel of water was filled at the pool of Siloam and taken to the altar. Next another golden vessel would be filled with wine and they both would be poured together into the basin. The mixed water and wine would flow down a conduit which carried the water to the Brook of Kidron located across from the eastern wall.

It pictured for the Jews the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom in which the Holy Spirit would be poured on Israel and believers from all nations. This ritual of water pouring was continued for six days. The last day was called the “Day of the Great Hosanan” (*Hoshannah Rabbah*). The

word “Hoshannah” means to *save now* and, applied to the feast, became “Hosanna.” It was a look forward to the coming of the Messiah to establish the kingdom of God on the earth.

This makes the event of Jesus entering the city in what is called the “Triumphal Entry” come alive for us. John records (12:13) that as Jesus entered Jerusalem the people, “took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Matthew 21:15 records the chief priest and scribes became seriously upset because this greeting and prayer was reserved only for the coming of the Messiah. Mark records that the people also cried “Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest” (11:10).

Following His entry into Jerusalem Jesus went to the Temple and we read, “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38-39).

Thus was Jesus representing Himself as the fulfillment of the symbolism of Tabernacles, as the Messiah Whose coming would result in the pouring-out upon all believers of the Holy Spirit and the establishing of the kingdom on earth.

What does this have to do with Ezekiel? In his commentary on Ezekiel, scholar Charles Lee Feinberg says,

Water-drawing on the Feast of Tabernacles... **owed much of its ceremonial symbolism to this passage** [in Ezekiel 47].

Prominent in chapter forty-seven is a fountain of water whose source is the Temple and continuously flows out through the Promised Land.

Ezekiel 47:1 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the

temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.

Ezekiel 47:2 He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side.

We've established in prior studies that the "he" who is leading Ezekiel on this tour is Jesus.

Why aren't we simply told it's Him? Because there is joy in the discovery! It's an aspect of our Lord that He is romantic and wants to be found out as we desire to know Him.

Ezekiel was led by Jesus back to the front of the Temple building where he saw the origin of the river coming from under the Temple porch. It apparently went underground and reemerged from under the eastern gate. As it continued through the city, into the countryside, toward the Jordan Valley, it became wider and deeper so that it was a great river.

It's not the only place in Scripture to describe this living water in the future kingdom:

- Psalm 46:4 alludes to the "river whose streams make glad the city of God."
- Psalm 65:9 speaks of the "streams of God" that provide water for the agriculture of the land.
- Isaiah 33:20 foresees Zion as a place of "broad rivers and streams."
- Joel 3:18 envisions the "fountain that will flow out of the Lord's house."
- Zechariah 14:8 describes the "living water" that will flow out from Jerusalem heading east and the west.

Ezekiel 47:3 And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles.

Ezekiel 47:4 Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist.

Ezekiel 47:5 Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.

Of interest here is that when this water emerges it is described, in verse two, as “run[ning] out.” The words mean *to trickle*. But this trickle, without any other water joining it, gets broader and deeper as it flows - defying all natural laws and putting us in the realm of the miraculous.

It’s hard to get a grip on the exact conditions that will prevail in the future Millennial Kingdom. The Lord is going to be doing all sorts of unusual things, like have a trickle of water become a mighty rushing river.

Ezekiel 47:6 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river.

Ezekiel 47:7 When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other.

Ezekiel 47:8 Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed.

Ezekiel 47:9 And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes.

Ezekiel 47:10 It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many.

Ezekiel 47:11 But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt.

Ezekiel 47:12 Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."

Don’t confuse this passage in Ezekiel with the description of eternity in Revelation chapter twenty-two. Yes, there are similarities, notably that a river flows through and nourishes trees on both its sides. In the Revelation, however, you are clearly told that there will be **no Temple** (21:22).

As this river enters the Dead Sea, the water there will become fresh. The Dead Sea, now some six times saltier than the ocean, will become completely salt-free. This now-lifeless body of water will then support life so that where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will crowd the shores.

While the Dead Sea itself will be made fresh, the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. Don't think of that as a bad thing! Salt is an essential element and the Dead Sea area is Israel's chief source of salt.

It's telling us that God will provide for all of Israel's needs.

Another way God will provide for Israel is by the trees on the riverbanks that will bear fruit year-round. God will use these trees to meet people's physical needs. The fruit will provide food and their leaves will provide healing. How healing will come from the leaves is not clear but sickness will be virtually eliminated. It's one of those 'Millennial-mysteries.'

Beginning with verses thirteen and fourteen we see the future division of the land to the tribes of Israel. It is a subject that will occupy the rest of the book.

Ezekiel 47:13 Thus says the Lord God: "These are the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions.

Ezekiel 47:14 You shall inherit it equally with one another; for I raised My hand in an oath to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance.

God promised Abraham and his physical descendants certain land in what we call the Middle East and that promise has never been rescinded. Israel's experiencing blessing in the land was conditioned on her obedience, but her right to possess the land has *never* been revoked.

Any system of understanding the Bible as a whole, what we call systematic theology, **must** account for the literal promises God made to the physical descendants of Abraham. Thus if a system is grossly ignorant of Israel, stating, for example, that **we** are now somehow 'spiritual Israel,' well, I reject that. And if the system is wrong on so fundamental a truth, so important a topic, why follow it at all?

One such system is called replacement theology. One of its adherents, Kenneth Gentry, defines replacement theology as follows: "We believe that the international Church has superseded for all times national Israel as the

institution for the administration of divine blessing to the world.” European scholar Ronald Diprose defines replacement theology as follows: "the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God's plan and as recipient of Old Testament promises addressed to Israel."

Also called *supersessionism*, they believe that Israel has no future in the plan of God. The church inherits all the blessings, while Israel is meant to endure only curses.

Another systematic theology, Reformed Covenant theology, is described by one of its adherents this way:

For Reformed theology, the church has always been the Israel of God and the Israel of God has always been the church. Reformed covenant theology distinguishes the old and new covenants. It recognizes that the church was temporarily administered through a typological, national people, but the church has existed since Adam, Noah, and Abraham; and it existed under Moses and David; and it exists under Christ.

No, the church has not existed since Adam! It is a mystery revealed in the New Testament.

At best, these views mishandle major portions of the Bible. At worst, they foster anti-Semitism. We reject their views on Israel. And I'm serious when I say that if they can be so wrong about Israel, which is such a huge part of Scripture, why think they are right about other issues?

We believe that the church is the current instrument through which God is working in this age **and** God has a future plan in which He will restore national Israel

In verses fifteen through twenty we get the borders of the land.

Ezekiel 47:15 "This shall be the border of the land on the north: from the Great Sea, by the road to Hethlon, as one goes to Zedad,

Ezekiel 47:16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim (which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath), to Hazar Hatticon (which is on the border of Hauran).

Ezekiel 47:17 Thus the boundary shall be from the Sea to Hazar Enan, the border of Damascus; and as for the north, northward, it is the border of Hamath. This is the north side.

Ezekiel 47:18 "On the east side you shall mark out the border from between Hauran and Damascus, and between Gilead and the land of Israel, along the Jordan, and along the eastern side of the sea. This is the east side.

Ezekiel 47:19 "The south side, toward the South, shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribah by Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea. This is the south side, toward the South.

Ezekiel 47:20 "The west side shall be the Great Sea, from the southern boundary until one comes to a point opposite Hamath. This is the west side.

The land shown to Moses in Deuteronomy thirty-four and allotted among the tribes by Joshua was never fully under Israelite control. Much of it was captured initially but abandoned to Canaanite resettlement when the Israelites failed to fully drive them out. More of it was lost during the disastrous days of the Judges. David recaptured a lot of it, but by reason of the faithlessness of the people of God, much was again lost to neighbors, far or distant, during the days of the kings. All had been lost, of course, as Ezekiel was writing to the exiles in Babylon.

The vision of a fully restored Israel, occupying all its territory, was given at a time when it was, in human terms, impossible. The exiles were to walk by faith in the ultimate future promised to them.

Ezekiel 47:21 "Thus you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel.

Ezekiel 47:22 It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.

Ezekiel 47:23 And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance," says the Lord God.

Ezekiel also included regulations for allotting land to resident aliens who will want to associate with Israel. Being considered native-born Israelites, they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. Though foreigners had always been allowed to live in Israel, in the Millennium they will be allowed to enjoy other privileges previously granted only to Israelites. Though the Millennial Age will be a time of blessing for believing Israel, believing Gentiles will also enjoy God's blessing.

This would have been a radical thought for the exiles. After all, they had just been conquered by a great Gentile power, Babylon. Add to that their ethnic prejudices.

Yet Ezekiel was bold to share what God was showing him. Though Israel would be the apple of His eye, God's mercy and grace and salvation extended to everyone.

Are there groups of people we have trouble envisioning as coming to faith in Jesus? We need to get over it and extend the Gospel to "whosoever will." The Gospel is God's universal provision for mankind's universal need.

"All who are thirsty" may come and drink freely of God's salvation.

