

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 22: The River from the Temple; the Lord Is There

Ezekiel 47:1–48:35

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

To present the river flowing from the temple as the life-giving stream of the gospel and the Holy Spirit, deepening and healing wherever it goes, fulfilled in Christ who gives living water and in the river of life at the end of Revelation.

To bring the whole temple vision of chapters 40–48 to its climax in the closing name, the LORD is there, God's everlasting dwelling with His people in Christ and the church and consummated in the eternal state, the great hope of the gospel and not a literal rebuilt temple with restored sacrifices.

Question 1

Student Question:

Where does the river in Ezekiel 47:1–2 begin, and what is the significance that life-giving water flows out from under the threshold of the temple, from the very dwelling place of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezekiel is brought back to the door of the house, and water is issuing out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, the front of the house. Life begins at the very dwelling of God.

The book opened with the glory of God departing the temple in judgment; now from that same restored dwelling a river of life flows out. The reversal is total: from departing glory to overflowing life.

The water comes from under the threshold, from beneath the place of God's presence. The source of all life is the presence of God Himself; the river has no other spring.

This is the picture that John takes up: out of Christ and out of the believer flow rivers of living water, the Spirit poured out from the dwelling place of God among men.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The river's source is the presence of God; all spiritual life and healing flow from Him alone, not from any human spring.
- Read the temple here as the dwelling of God fulfilled in Christ and in His church, the body in which the Spirit dwells, not as a future stone building.

- The reversal from departed glory to flowing life frames the whole vision as the story of God returning to dwell with and give life to His people.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the river begins at the dwelling of God?
- Where are you looking for life apart from the presence of God?
- How does Christ become the source of living water in your life?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where in your own life is the water still only ankle-deep, and where do you long for it to rise to waters you cannot cross on your own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezekiel is led around to the outer gate, and the water is running out on the south side, escaping the temple precincts and going out into the world beyond.

The river does not stay within the holy enclosure; it presses outward toward the land and the people. The life of God is not hoarded but sent.

The trickle at the threshold is now a flow moving out into the open. What begins small at the place of God's presence is destined to go far.

This outward movement pictures the gospel going out from the dwelling of God into all the world, the Spirit poured out and sent to the nations.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The river is meant to go out, not to be contained; the life of God presses outward toward a thirsty world.
- The outward flow pictures the missionary movement of the gospel from God's presence into all the earth.
- A church that dams the river, keeping the life to itself, contradicts the very nature of what flows from God's dwelling.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the river flow out beyond the temple rather than pool within it?
- Are you a channel for the river or a place where it stops?
- How is the gospel meant to flow out from God's people into the world?

Question 3

Student Question:

The river deepens from ankles to knees to waist to a river that cannot be passed over (47:3–5). What does this deepening picture about the life and power that flows from God's presence?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The man with the line measures off a thousand cubits at a time, and at each stage the water is deeper: to the ankles, then the knees, then the loins, and at last a river that could not be passed over, waters to swim in.

The deepening is steady and measured, not chaotic. The life that flows from God grows and rises by His ordering, drawing the one who follows into ever deeper water.

At the last stage the river overwhelms; it cannot be forded, only swum. There is a point where one must give up footing on the bottom and be carried by the river itself.

This pictures the growing power of the gospel and the Spirit in a life and in the world, beginning small but rising until it overwhelms, no longer something we manage but something that carries us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deepening river teaches that the life of God grows; the believer is meant to be drawn ever deeper, not to remain at the shallows.
- Waters to swim in picture surrender, where one stops trying to stand on one's own footing and is carried by the Spirit.
- The measured stages show that this growth is under God's ordering and design, not random; He leads His people deeper by His own hand.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is the water still only ankle-deep in your walk with God?
- What would it mean to leave your footing and let the river carry you?
- How has God led you into deeper water over time?

Question 4**Student Question:**

Can you trace how God has taken you into deeper water over time, and where are you tempted to stay where you can still touch the bottom?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The man asks, Son of man, have you seen this? and brings him back to the bank of the river, where Ezekiel sees very many trees on the one side and on the other.

Along the banks of the river life springs up abundantly; the trees are the evidence of the water's effect. Where the river runs, life flourishes on every side.

Ezekiel is made to look and consider; the question, have you seen this, presses him to grasp the wonder of what flows from God's presence.

The trees lining the river anticipate Revelation's tree of life beside the river of the water of life, the fruit and healing that the gospel brings wherever it reaches.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The abundant trees show that the river's effect is life and fruitfulness; where the gospel reaches, life springs up.
- The question pressed on Ezekiel calls every reader to truly see and reckon with the life that flows from God.
- The trees on both banks anticipate Revelation 22, binding Ezekiel's vision to the final picture of the river and tree of life.

Discussion Prompts

- What grows along the banks wherever the river flows?
- Have you truly seen what flows from the presence of God?
- Where is your life bearing the fruit of the river, and where is it barren?

Question 5

Student Question:

Wherever the river goes it brings healing, makes the salt sea fresh, and gives fruitful trees whose leaves are for healing (47:6–12). What does this teach about the reach and effect of what flows from God's dwelling?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The river flows down toward the Arabah and into the sea, the Dead Sea, and the waters are healed; everything lives wherever the river comes.

The Dead Sea, salt and lifeless, is made fresh by the river. The most hopeless and dead place is brought to life where the water reaches it; nothing is beyond its healing.

Wherever the river comes there is a great multitude of fish; abundant life replaces death. The transformation is not partial but teeming and full.

This is the gospel reaching the most dead and hopeless places and making them alive, a picture of the saving, life-giving power of Christ poured out by the Spirit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The healing of the Dead Sea teaches that no place and no person is too dead for the river of God's life to reach.
- Everything lives where the river comes; the gospel brings life out of death, the saving work of Christ.
- The abundance of life that replaces lifelessness pictures the fullness of salvation, not a mere improvement but resurrection life.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it teach that the river heals even the Dead Sea?
- What dead place in your life do you long for the river to reach?
- Whose hopeless situation might the gospel make alive through you?

Question 6

Student Question:

Whose dry or salty life around you might the river reach through you this week, and are you a channel for it or a dam against it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Fishermen stand along the shore from En-gedi to En-eglaim, spreading nets, and the fish are very many, like the fish of the great sea, exceedingly abundant.

Yet the marshes and miry places are given over to salt, not healed. Even at the climax of the vision there remains a sober note: not everything is made fresh.

The abundance of fish drawn by the fishermen suggests the great gathering of people that follows where the river of the gospel runs.

The picture of fishermen and a great catch recalls the Lord's call to His apostles to be fishers of men, the church gathering many where the gospel flows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The great catch of fish pictures the gathering of many people into life through the gospel that flows from God's presence.
- The marshes left to salt sound a sober note: the offer of life is real, yet some places and hearts remain unhealed, a warning against presuming on the river.
- The fishermen recall the apostolic call to be fishers of men; God draws His people through the spread of the gospel.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the great catch of fish picture about the gospel?

- Why are the marshes left to salt, and what warning is in that?
- How are you taking part in fishing for men where the river flows?

Question 7

Student Question:

The land is bounded and the city has twelve gates named for the twelve tribes (48:30–34). What does it picture that the people of God are named and gathered at the very gates of the city of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

On both banks grow all kinds of trees for food, whose leaves do not wither and whose fruit does not fail; they bear fresh fruit every month because the water flows from the sanctuary.

The reason for their fruitfulness is named plainly: because their water flows from the sanctuary, from the dwelling of God. The source of all life and healing is His presence.

Their fruit is for food and their leaves for healing, a constant, monthly supply that never fails. The river yields unfailing nourishment and healing for the people of God.

Revelation 22:2 takes up this very image: the tree of life bearing twelve kinds of fruit, with leaves for the healing of the nations, beside the river of the water of life from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unfailing fruit and healing leaves teach that the life flowing from God's presence is constant and sufficient, never running dry.
- The leaves for healing point to the gospel's power to heal the nations, fulfilled in Revelation 22 by the tree of life beside the river of life.
- The water flowing from the sanctuary names the source: all this life and healing comes from the dwelling of God, fulfilled in Christ and the Spirit.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the fruitfulness traced back to water from the sanctuary?
- Where do you need the unfailing fruit and healing of the river?
- How does Revelation 22 open up the meaning of these healing leaves?

Question 8

Student Question:

Are you living as one who belongs at the gates of the city of God, named among His people, or as a stranger who keeps Him at a distance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The land is divided among the twelve tribes in ordered portions, with the holy district and the sanctuary set in the midst, and the prince's land on either side, framing the dwelling of God at the center.

The arrangement is idealized and symmetrical, every tribe given a place, with the presence of God at the heart of the whole. This is the picture of a people perfectly gathered around their God.

This is not a literal survey of returning exiles' farms; it is the vision's way of showing a redeemed people fully ordered around the dwelling of God in their midst.

The pattern anticipates the people of God gathered and named around His presence, fulfilled in the church and consummated in the city whose center is God and the Lamb.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ordered division pictures a redeemed people gathered around God's presence, not a literal future land allotment to be enforced.
- The sanctuary at the center teaches that God's dwelling is the heart around which His people are arranged.
- Read this as the consummation of God's purpose to gather a people to Himself, fulfilled in Christ and the church and the eternal city.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it picture that every tribe is given a place around the sanctuary?
- Is the presence of God truly the center around which your life is ordered?
- How does this gathered people point to the church and the eternal city?

Question 9

Student Question:

The whole temple vision climaxes here: the river of the gospel and the Spirit (John 7:37-39; Revelation 22:1-2) flowing from God's dwelling, and the city's new name, the LORD is there (48:35). How does this bring the entire vision of chapters 40-48 to its true fulfillment, God's everlasting dwelling with His people in Christ and in His church and consummated in the eternal state (Revelation 21:3), rather than a literal rebuilt temple with restored sacrifices that would deny the finished work of the cross?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The city is described with twelve gates, three on each side, named for the twelve tribes of Israel: the gate of Reuben, Judah, Levi, and all the rest, the whole people named at the entrances.

The tribes are written on the gates so that the people of God are named at the very way into the city; to enter is to enter among the named people of God.

This is the image John takes up in Revelation 21, the holy city with twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes, and the wall with the names of the twelve apostles.

The named gates picture the one people of God, gathered out of all generations, given a place and a name in the city where God dwells.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The twelve named gates picture the people of God, fulfilled in Revelation 21 in the holy city of the redeemed.
- To be named at the gates is to belong among God's people; the gospel gives a place and a name in the city of God.
- Read the city as the dwelling place of God with His people, fulfilled in the church and consummated in the eternal city, not as a future earthly Jerusalem restored under the old order.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the people of God are named at the gates?
- Are you living as one named among the people of God?
- How does Revelation 21 fulfill this picture of the named city?

Question 10

Student Question:

If the book ends with the LORD is there, where is the one place in your life you have been keeping Him out, and what will you do this week to live as one with whom God dwells?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The book ends with the city's measurement and then its everlasting name: and the name of the city from that day shall be, the LORD is there, Yahweh Shammah.

The whole prophecy began with the glory of God departing the temple under judgment; it ends with the name that says God is present, dwelling among His people forever. The arc is from departed glory to the LORD is there.

This is the deepest hope of all Scripture: God dwelling with His people. The name does not promise stone and sacrifice but the abiding presence of God in their midst.

It is fulfilled in Immanuel, God with us, in Christ; in the church where God dwells by His Spirit; and consummated in Revelation 21:3, the dwelling of God is with men, He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The whole temple vision climaxes here: not in a rebuilt stone temple with restored animal sacrifices, but in the everlasting presence of God with His people, the LORD is there.
- A literal restoration of the temple and its sacrifices would deny the once-for-all, final sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, Hebrews 9:11–14 and 10:1–18; the hope of the vision is God's presence, fulfilled in Christ.
- The LORD is there is fulfilled in Immanuel, God with us, in the church where God dwells by His Spirit, and consummated in the eternal state of Revelation 21:3, the great hope of the gospel.
- The river and the name belong together: the life-giving stream of the gospel and the Spirit flows from the God who has come to dwell with His people forever.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the LORD is there bring the whole book from departed glory to abiding presence?
- Where have you been keeping God at a distance rather than living as one with whom He dwells?
- How is this hope fulfilled in Christ, in the church, and in the eternal state?