Ezekiel 47

The River from the Sanctuary: Everything Will Live

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Life flows out of the place where God lives. It starts small, gets deeper the farther it goes, and heals everything it touches — even the Dead Sea. Only what refuses the river stays salt. And the God who gives the river also makes room in the land for the outsider.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 47 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions
Green Command / instruction
⇄ Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning
★ Violet Promise / blessing
◷ Amber Time / place / contrast

[1] Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, ▲ waters issued out from under the threshold of the house ◷ eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.

[2] Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side.

[3] And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; ◷ the waters were to the ankles.

[4] Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; ◷ the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; ◷ the waters were to the loins.

[5] Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was ★ a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, ★ waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

[6] And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river.

[7] Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were ★ very many trees on the one side and on the other.

[8] Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and ◷ go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be ⇄ healed.

[9] And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be ⇄ healed; and ★ every thing shall live whither the river cometh.

[10] And it shall come to pass, that ★ the fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi even unto Eneglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.

[11] But the miry places thereof and the marishes thereof shall not be ⇄ healed; ⚠ they shall be given to salt.

[12] And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, ★ whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: ★ it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because ▲ their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and ★ the leaf thereof for medicine.

[13] ▲ Thus saith the Lord GOD; This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: ◷ Joseph shall have two portions.

[14] And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another: concerning the which ▲ I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers: and this land shall fall unto you for ⇄ inheritance.

15 And this shall be the border of the land toward the north side, from the great sea, the way of Hethlon, as men go to Zedad;

16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazarhatticon, which is by the coast of Hauran.

17 And the border from the sea shall be Hazarenan, the border of Damascus, and the north northward, and the border of Hamath. And this is the north side.

18 And the east side ye shall measure from Hauran, and from Damascus, and from Gilead, and from the land of Israel by Jordan, from the border unto the east sea. And this is the east side.

19 And the south side southward, from Tamar even to the waters of strife in Kadesh, the river to the great sea. And this is the south side southward.

20 The west side also shall be the great sea from the border, till a man come over against Hamath. This is the west side.

21 So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel.

22 And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an ⇄ inheritance unto you, and to ★ the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you ★ as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have ⇄ inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.

23 And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his ⇄ inheritance, saith the Lord GOD.

Marked in the text

- **v1** ▲ waters issued out from under the threshold of the house
- **v1** ◷ eastward
- **v3** ◷ the waters were to the ankles
- **v4** ◷ the waters were to the knees
- **v4** ◷ the waters were to the loins
- **v5** ★ a river that I could not pass over
- **v5** ★ waters to swim in
- **v6** ▮▮ Son of man, hast thou seen this?
- **v7** ★ very many trees
- **v8** ◷ go down into the desert
- **v8** ⇄ healed *(every occurrence)*
- **v9** ★ every thing shall live whither the river cometh
- **v10** ★ the fishers shall stand upon it
- **v11** ⚠ they shall be given to salt
- **v12** ★ whose leaf shall not fade
- **v12** ★ it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months
- **v12** ▲ their waters they issued out of the sanctuary
- **v12** ★ the leaf thereof for medicine
- **v13** ▲ Thus saith the Lord GOD
- **v13** ◷ Joseph shall have two portions
- **v14** ▲ I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers
- **v14** ⇄ inheritance *(every occurrence)*
- **v22** ★ the strangers that sojourn among you
- **v22** ★ as born in the country among the children of Israel
- **v23** ▮▮ there shall ye give him his inheritance

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 47:12 (KJV)

12 And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, ★ whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: ★ it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because ▲ their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and ★ the leaf thereof for medicine.

Setting

The temple vision that began "in the twenty-fifth year of our exile" (40:1), about 573 BC, now turns from rules of worship to life flowing out of God's house. Ezekiel's guide — the man with the measuring line (40:3) — brings him back to the door of the temple. Ezekiel is a priest in exile by a Babylonian canal; Jerusalem is in ruins and the Dead Sea lies lifeless below it. What he sees next is a river where no river had ever run, and then the borders of a land divided among all twelve tribes.

Structure

- vv1–2 — **the source:** "water was flowing from under the threshold of the house" toward the east (v1), south of the altar, and trickling out on the south side of the outer east gate (v2).
- vv3–6 — **deeper and deeper:** every thousand cubits the man measures and leads Ezekiel through — "water reaching the ankles" (v3), "water reaching the knees," "water reaching the loins" (v4), until it is "a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, enough water to swim in" (v5). "Son of man, have you seen this?" (v6).
- vv7–12 — **everything lives:** "very many trees" on both banks (v7). "These waters go out toward the eastern region" (v8) into the sea, and "the waters of the sea become fresh" (v8). "Every living creature which swarms" will live, "there will be very many fish," and "everything will live where the river goes" (v9). Fishermen spread nets "from Engedi to Eneglaim" (v10). But the swamps and marshes are "left for salt" (v11). Fruit trees grow on both banks: "their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing" (v12).
- vv13–14 — **the land promised:** the land is divided among the twelve tribes; "Joseph shall have two portions" (v13). Each tribe shares equally, "for I swore to give it to your forefathers" (v14).
- vv15–20 — **the four borders:** north from the Great Sea toward Hamath and Damascus (vv15–17); east along the Jordan to the eastern sea (v18); south from Tamar to the waters of Meribath-kadesh and the brook of Egypt (v19); west, the Great Sea (v20).
- vv21–23 — **room for the outsider:** the land is divided by lot for Israel and for "the aliens who stay in your midst" who raise children there; they are to be treated as "native-born" (v22). Whatever tribe he lives among, "there you shall give him his inheritance" (v23).

Repeated words

water / waters (vv1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 19); river (vv5, 6, 7, 9, 12); fresh (vv8, 9, 11); trees (vv7, 12); live / living (v9, three times); tribes (vv13, 21, 22); inheritance (vv13, 14, 22, 23).

Contrasts

a trickle at the threshold (v1) ⟷ a river too deep to cross (v5). Ankles ⟷ swimming (vv3–5). The Dead Sea ⟷ "very many fish" (vv8–9). Fresh water ⟷ marshes "left for salt" (vv9, 11). Trees that wither ⟷ leaves that never wither and fruit every month (v12). The alien on the outside ⟷ the alien counted as native-born with an inheritance (vv22–23).

Chapter theme (my words)

Life flows out of the place where God lives. It starts small, gets deeper the farther it goes, and heals everything it touches — even the Dead Sea. Only what refuses the river stays salt. And the God who gives the river also makes room in the land for the outsider.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 47:1 (KJV)

[1]Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, ▲ waters issued out from under the threshold of the house 🕒 eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.

A river from God's house (vv1–2)

Jerusalem never had a river; its water came from the Gihon spring and cisterns. Here the water comes out of the sanctuary itself, past the altar. Guzik stresses that it comes from God's house, not from a palace or a marketplace. Taylor, in Guzik: "Blessing, fertility and water are almost interchangeable ideas in the Old Testament." The image runs through the Bible: the river out of Eden (Gen 2:10), the river that makes glad the city of God (Ps 46:4), living waters from Jerusalem (Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8), and the river of the water of life in the new Jerusalem (Rev 22:1–2).

Literal, spiritual, or both?

Guzik reads this as a literal river in Messiah's coming kingdom, linking it with Joel 3:18 and Zechariah 14:8, and he faults commentators who spiritualize it away; yet he also draws spiritual lessons from it. He says it isn't the same as the river in Revelation, which, as Alexander (in Guzik) notes, flows from the throne of God. Many other Christians — especially amillennial and Reformed readers — see the river as a picture of the life of the Spirit flowing from God's presence through Christ and His church to the nations, finally fulfilled in the new creation. Jesus' words about rivers of living water from within the believer (John 7:37–39) stand behind both readings.

Deeper and deeper (vv3–6)

No streams join it, yet the river keeps rising — Guzik calls the increase miraculous. Four thousand cubits (well over a mile) take Ezekiel from ankles to over his head. Guzik uses the depths as a call to move from shallow faith to a deeper life led by the Spirit. Meyer, in Guzik: "We need the ankle-depths of walking to be exchanged for the knee-depths of praying." The guide's question, "Son of man, have you seen this?" (v6), presses Ezekiel to take it in.

The Dead Sea healed (vv7–11)

The Dead Sea is one of the saltiest bodies of water on earth; nothing lives in it. Ezekiel sees it turned fresh, swarming with fish, with fishermen working from Engedi on its western shore to Eneglaim (its location is uncertain). Guzik sees literal fulfillment in the coming age and also a picture of the gospel's present work, and he notes that God cares about His creation (Rom 8:19–22). The swamps "left for salt" (v11) may preserve salt for use, as Guzik suggests; others see a sober note that what will not receive the river stays as it was. Guzik faults commentators who spiritualize these details, calling Clarke's reading "an overly-spiritualized approach."

Trees of healing (v12)

Fruit every month and leaves that never wither — because "their water flows from the sanctuary." This echoes the tree of life (Gen 2:9) and points ahead to the tree of life in Revelation 22:2, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. The blessed man of Psalm 1 is a tree planted by streams of water whose leaf does not wither (Ps 1:3; compare Jer 17:7–8).

The land and its borders (vv13–20)

God marks real borders for the twelve tribes, largely matching Numbers 34:1–12. Joseph gets two portions because Ephraim and Manasseh count as two tribes (Gen 48:5), keeping the number at twelve once Levi is set apart to the sanctuary. Each tribe shares equally, grounded in God's oath to the patriarchs (Gen 12:7; 15:18). Guzik takes these as literal millennial borders, says exact locations can't be fixed because geography will change before then; Alexander, in Guzik, adds that this is not the eternal state, since there is still a sea (Rev 21:1). Readers who take the vision symbolically see in the borders the certainty of God's promise and its fulfillment in Christ, the true heir (Gal 3:16, 29).

The alien as native-born (vv21–23)

The Law already told Israel to love the stranger (Lev 19:33–34), but here the resident alien who settles and raises a family receives an inheritance of land like a born Israelite. Vawter and Hoppe, in Guzik, note that "Ezekiel goes far beyond the Torah's legislation," and Taylor, also in Guzik, reads it as proselytes who fully join Israel's life. It anticipates the gospel, in which Gentiles who were strangers become fellow citizens (Eph 2:12, 19).

Word study (Hebrew)

- **water — *mayim* (H4325):** water, waters.
- **threshold — *miphtan* (H4670):** threshold, sill.
- **river — *nachal* (H5158):** a stream, torrent, wadi.
- **swim — *sachu* (H7813):** swimming; water deep enough to swim.
- **become fresh — *rapha*ʾ (H7495):** to heal, make whole, repair.

- **live — *chayah* (H2421):** to live, revive, keep alive.
- **fish — *dagah* (H1710):** fish.
- **salt — *melach* (H4417):** salt.
- **leaf — *ʿaleh* (H5929):** leaf, foliage.
- **wither — *nabel* (H5034):** to fade, wither, decay.
- **healing — *terupah* (H8644):** remedy, medicine.
- **sanctuary — *miqdash* (H4720):** holy place, sanctuary.
- **inheritance — *nachalah* (H5159):** inherited portion, possession.
- **alien — *ger* (H1616):** sojourner, resident foreigner.
- **native-born — *ʾezrach* (H249):** one born in the land, a native.

Cross-references

Gen 2:9–10; Gen 48:5; Lev 19:33–34; Num 34:1–12; Ps 1:3; Ps 36:8–9; Ps 46:4; Isa 35:6–7; Isa 56:3–7; Jer 17:7–8; Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8; John 4:14; John 7:37–39; Rom 8:19–22; Gal 3:29; Eph 2:12–19; Rev 21:1; Rev 22:1–2.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 47:5 (KJV)

5 Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was ★ a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, ★ waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

Command to obey — "Son of man, have you seen this?"

(v6). The guide wouldn't let Ezekiel walk past what God was doing. I'm called to stop and look — to see where God's life is moving and to step in deeper. I won't stay at the ankles when He's leading me into water over my head.

Sin to confess — staying in the shallows

Ankle-deep faith is comfortable: I can still stand on my own. I confess where I've kept God at a depth I could control. Going deeper means losing my footing and being carried.

Warning to heed — "left for salt"

(v11). The river healed everything it reached, but the marshes stayed salt. Some men sit right next to the river — in chapel, in a meeting, in a Bible study — and never let it in. I've been that man. Being near the water isn't the same as being changed by it.

Promise to trust — "everything will live where the river goes"

(v9). The Dead Sea is the hardest case on the map, and God makes it teem with life. For the man who thinks addiction or a prison number has made him dead water, this is the word: no life is too salty for the river that flows from God's house.

Example to follow — make room for the outsider

God gave the alien an inheritance like the native-born (v22). In our study groups the newcomer, the man just released, the one with nothing, should be treated as family — not as a guest on probation.

Worship

From the LORD's house flows a river that deepens, heals and gives life. His trees never wither; their fruit never fails; their leaves heal. He keeps His oath to the fathers, and He makes room at His table for strangers.

Prayer

Lord GOD, lead me out past my depth. Let Your river flow into the dead places in me and in the men I serve, and make them live. Don't let any of us stay salt beside the water. Make me a tree planted by Your stream, with leaves that bring healing to others. And make my heart wide toward the stranger, as Yours was toward me. In Jesus' name. Amen.