EZEKIEL

Chapter 47

*The River From the Temple*

**The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar.  2 He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was flowing from the south side. 3 As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep.  4 He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist.  5 He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross.  6 He asked me, “Son of man, do you see this?” Then he led me back to the bank of the river.  7 When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river.  8 He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh.  9 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.  10 Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Great Sea.  11 But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt.  12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”**

**47:1-48:35** All the rest of the book is a vision of the new land. Sometimes the final verses (48:30–35) on the New Jerusalem are considered a sort of an appendix, but they cannot be disassociated from the preceding material. (CC)

If there were ever any doubt about the otherworldly and eschatological orientation of chapters 40–48, they will dissipate after these final two chapters, especially the opening section, 47:1–12. The vision shown Ezekiel is nothing that could be implemented by Ezekiel’s fellow Israelites after the exile, nor could it be achieved by Christians during a millennial reign of Christ on this earth. Rather, only God himself can bring about the rejuvenation of the land to an Edenic state as pictured here, and this God has promised to do after the return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 21–22). In short, Ezekiel 47–48 depicts the new heavens and new earth in which all God’s redeemed believers will dwell for eternity. The same implication is in Rom 8:10–23 (cf. Acts 3:21), which promises that after the return of Christ, all believers will be raised bodily to eternal life, and even “the creation itself will be freed from its slavery to decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). (CC)

**47:1-12** In what is virtually a “new creation” scene, Ezekiel first describes a thorough revivification of the land as a result of the river of the water of life flowing out from the temple. Possible sources and/or parallels to this part of the vision, as well as the overview of the history of its exegesis, will be considered because of the importance of this passage. (CC)

One must be circumspect in inquiring about the sources of this vision. Critical scholars suppose that Ezekiel drew on other written and/or oral sources and combined them with his own ideas as he (and later, his followers) composed the text. However, Ezekiel himself states that the vision was revealed and explained to him by Yahweh and his supernatural guide (40:1–4). The prophet’s role was largely passive: to see the vision, write it down, and preach it to the Israelites (40:4b; 43:10–11). The supernatural process of inspiration (and whatever else might have been revealed to Ezekiel in addition to what is in his book) we cannot investigate. Extrabiblical writings with surface similarities are too distant in theological content to draw any conclusions from. (CC)

The only sources available to us are the text of Ezekiel and other biblical ones. For them “parallels” would often be better than “sources,” partly because we are sometimes unsure whether they precede or date after Ezekiel (sixth century b.c.), and partly because they may be independent revelations, without any literary dependency. Certain traditions (whether oral or written) may have been known among God’s people before their incorporation into the inspired biblical revelation. Critical axioms that often equated simplicity and brevity with early date must be abjured. (CC)

The starting point must be the creation narrative of Genesis 1–2 itself. The notes below on individual verses in Ezek 47:1–12 explain various points where “new creation” pictures possibly drawn from Genesis are evident. At several points earlier in Ezekiel, the location of Eden appears as a paradise on a “mountain” (28:14, 16; 31:12) as well as being a “garden” (28:13; 31:8–9). Paradisiacal mountain references appear elsewhere, for example, Is 11:9 and 25:6 and the parallel passages Is 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–3. Ezek 47:1–12 plainly merges two pictures, that of Eden (original or restored) and that of Mount Zion/Jerusalem. Apparently, the same “vertical typology” that made the ark simultaneously God’s throne (e.g., 1 Sam 4:4) and his footstool (1 Chr 28:2) was easily extended in ever-widening concentric circles to Jerusalem, to the whole land of Israel, and ultimately, in visions of the eschaton, to the entire new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 11; 65:17–25; Revelation 21–22). Although Ezekiel’s major focus is on the environs of Jerusalem, the universal implications of the Gospel of life are implicit. Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden because of their sin, but God’s salvation enables all believers to regain access to the everlasting paradise. In the OT era, this salvation was bestowed through the divine service at the Jerusalem temple, replaced by the person of Christ himself (Jn 2:18–23), who promises “paradise” to all who trust in him (Lk 23:43; Rev 2:7). (CC)

Eschatological descriptions of almost boundless fertility are rife in the OT. They are the Gospel remedy for the curse of sterility and death brought by sin. One need mention only the conclusion of Amos (9:13–15), the “great reversal” structure of Hosea 1–2, and countless examples in the Psalms and Isaiah. (CC)

Fertility requires water, and so Ps 46:4 speaks of a river with multiple streams in connection with Zion, possibly associated symbolically with the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley directly below the City of David (Ophel). Ps 36:8–9 speaks of “the river of your [Yahweh’s] delights” and “a fountain of life” in connection with Yahweh’s house. The closest OT parallel to Ezekiel’s vision is near the end of the book of Joel (3:17–18), where among other pictures of eschatological plenty we find a prediction that “all the streambeds of Judah will flow with water, and a spring will issue from the house of Yahweh and will water the wadi of Shittim.” (CC)

Perhaps Zech 14:5b–11 (late sixth century) is at least partially dependent on Ezekiel’s earlier prophecy. It describes an even more drastic geographical change than did Ezekiel. The temple no longer plays any explicit role, but “living waters” flowing from Jerusalem are pictured, and they will flow year-round, “half of them to the Eastern [Dead] Sea and half of them to the Western [Mediterranean] Sea” (Zech 14:8). (CC)

In the NT, if not a quotation, then at least an allusion to Ezek 47:1–12 and Zech 14:8 can be seen in Jn 7:37–39, where Jesus cites “the Scripture” that speaks of “living water” flowing from within the believer. The evangelist John explains that this refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit, which believers would receive (on Pentecost, and subsequently through Christian Baptism [Acts 2:38–39]) after Jesus was glorified (on Easter and then Ascension). Another close verbal and thematic parallel to Jn 7:37–39 is Song 4:15, where Solomon’s beloved bride (a type of the bride of Christ) is portrayed in Edenic terms as a verdant garden with “living waters and flowing streams from Lebanon.” Jn 7:37–39 caps a series of passages, beginning with the baptism and testimony of John the Baptist (Jn 1:24–36), the necessity to be “born again of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5), and Jesus’ offer of “living water” to the Samaritan woman by the well (Jn 4:10–14), that associate flowing water with the gift of the Spirit, regeneration, and life everlasting. As in Ezek 47:1–12, where the flowing water enables what was dead to have life, so these other passages with “living water(s)” refer not simply to flowing water, but water that gives life through the power of the Spirit, who is “the Lord and giver of life” (Nicene Creed, alluding to Jn 6:63). This vivifying water is poured out in Holy Baptism (Acts 22:16; Eph 5:26–27; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21). The LXX translation of Ezek 47:3 with ὕδωρ ἀφέσεως, which can mean “water of forgiveness,” helped early church interpreters connect the river portrayed in 47:1–12 with Baptism. (CC)

There is no doubt that the vision given the apostle John in Rev 22:1–2 is intended to recall and fulfill that given Ezekiel. The temple in its old sense no longer figures, because God and the Lamb will be the temple of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:22), and from their throne will flow the “water of life,” clear as crystal, through the middle of the street (Rev 22:1–2). “On either side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve kinds of fruit, bearing its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2)—words that repeat Ezek 47:7, 12 almost verbatim. “The tree of life” is the language of paradise restored (Gen 2:9; 3:22, 24; cf. Prov 3:18; 11:30). Christ promises, “To the one who is victorious, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7), and God gives that victory to every believer through enduring faith (1 Cor 15:57; 1 Jn 5:4). (CC)

Brighton summarizes:

The fact that in Ezek 47:1–12 this water comes from the temple indicates that it is through God’s covenantal presence in his Word and in the forgiveness of sins provided by divinely ordained sacrifice, which was fulfilled in Christ, that this saving power flows from God. That it also comes from Jerusalem (Zech 14:8) suggests that because of the salvation brought about in Zion, this spiritual power would go forth from the holy city. “The river of the water of life” here in Rev 22:1 refers to the spiritual power of God and of the Lamb that will sustain forever the communal life of God’s people with him in the new heaven and earth. It also indicates that all physical life will also be richly supplied by pure natural water as in the first Eden. (CC)

Implicit in Ezek 47:1–12 is the theme of the curse supplanted by blessing. The transgression of Adam brought the divine curse and death upon the original creation and prevented his access to the tree of life (Gen 3:17–24). Christ absorbed the divine curse in his death on the cursed “tree” of the cross (Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 2:24). Thus his cross is, in a sense, the new tree of life, since by it the devil, who overcame Adam and Eve by means of a tree, has been overcome. Moreover, God enables the believer to become a blessed, continually watered, ever fruitful tree whose leaves never wither (Ps 1:1–3; Jer 17:7–8; cf. Jn 15:1–8), just like those trees depicted in Ezek 47:12 and Rev 22:2, when “there will no longer be any cursed thing” (Rev 22:3). (CC)

While the NT does not provide a detailed verse-by-verse exegesis of Ezekiel’s vision, its appropriation by the seer of Patmos certainly points to a Christological and Spiritual focus, and we must await the beatific vision we ourselves will behold in God’s good time, by his grace. Excluded, of course, is the literalism of millennialists who expect a rebuilding of the temple on the present Mount Zion with water issuing out of it. (CC)

**47:1** *man.* The angelic guide (40:3), who here appears for the last time, concluded Ezekiel’s visionary tour of the new temple. (CSB)

*entrance of the temple.* Ezekiel was standing in the inner court. (CSB)

*water.* The rest of this section (vv. 1–12) makes it clear that healing, life-nurturing water is meant (see Psz. 36:8; 46:4 and notes; see also Joel 3:18; Zec 13:1; 14:8; Rev. 22:1–2). In the larger background was the river flowing from the Garden of Eden (Ge 2:10). (CSB)

Ezekiel was last situated near the sacrificial kitchens in the corners of the temple compound (46:21–24) and is now brought back to the פֶּ֣תַח, “entrance” of the temple, probably at the entrance to the nave. See figures 2 and 5. The one who conducts the prophet is the supernatural guide. He addresses Ezekiel as “son of man” (47:6) just as Yahweh does throughout the book. Several different Hiphil verbs (all third masculine singular imperfect with *waw* consecutive and first common singular suffix) serve as forms of the guidance formula: וַיְשִׁבֵנִי, “he brought me back,” in 47:1, 6; וַיּוֹצִאֵנִי֨, he led me out,” in 47:2; וַיְסִבֵּ֙נִי֨, “he brought me around,” in 47:2; וַיַּעֲבִרֵנִי, “he led me through,” in 47:3, 4 (twice); and וַיּוֹלִכֵ֥נִי, “he led me,” in 47:6. (CC)

The water flows down because of the gradually descending levels of the temple and the courts as described in chapters 40–42. However, since Ezekiel began his tour outside the temple complex, he had referred to seven steps leading up to the outer court (40:22, 26; see also 40:6), then eight steps up to the inner court (40:31, 34, 37), and finally ten steps leading up into vestibule of the temple itself (40:49). (CC)

At its source, the water flowed out מִתַּ֨חַת מִפְתַּ֤ן הַבַּ֙יִת֙, “from under the threshold of the temple” (47:1). The מִפְתָּן was the stone slab at the base of a door, part of which would be visible to an observer on the outside. The second half of the verse defines the place of the water’s emergence more precisely: מִתַּ֜חַת מִכֶּ֤תֶף הַבַּ֙יִת֙ הַיְמָנִ֔ית, “from under the south side of the temple.” Here מִתַּחַת is somewhat awkwardly repeated (but omitted in the versions); it is possibly more intelligible if separated syntactically from the following מִכֶּ֤תֶף (literally, “from under, from …”). כָּתֵף, “shoulder,” as an architectural term refers to a “side” or “sidewall” of the temple façade. Here we should attempt to visualize the part of the eastern wall of the nave between the door and the pillars. Since the orientation is eastward (כִּֽי־פְנֵ֥י הַבַּ֖יִת קָדִ֑ים, literally, “the face of the temple was east”), the phrases in 47:1–2 with כָּתֵף and הַיְמָנִית, literally, “the right side,” are translated as “the south side.” From the corner of the southern wall of the vestibule and the eastern wall of the nave, the water flowed across the inner court past the south side of the altar of burnt offering and then across the outer court. (CC)

Hengstenberg opines that the indwelling of the Glory of Yahweh in the temple, which Ezekiel had witnessed in 43:1–12, was necessary for the life-giving water to flow from the temple, and that that indwelling points to the incarnation of Christ, “in whom all the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). The flow of the water past the altar suggests that sacrificial atonement (by Christ) was necessary in order for the new life brought by the river to come to the dead and barren creation (and creatures, including humanity). (CC)

**47:2** *brought me out through the north gate.* Because the east gate was closed (44:2). (CSB)

Because the eastern outer gateway was closed to human traffic after the Glory of Yahweh entered the temple (44:1–3), the guide must lead Ezekiel through the northern gateway and around the outside. (The word רֶּ֖רֶךְ is somewhat intrusive in the phrase רֶּ֖רֶךְ הַפּוֹנֶ֣ה קָדִ֑ים since the phrase is describing the “gateway [שַׁ֣עַר] … facing east.”) Here again Ezekiel can see the flow of water. Since it is the same water already mentioned, one would expect the article with מַיִם, as in the LXX. The plural participle used to describe the water’s sound, מְפַכִּ֔ים, is a hapax, the Piel of a presumed verb פָּכָה. Since it probably is onomatopoetic, “gurgle” or “bubble” might be more accurate translations than “trickle.” The same onomatopoesis appears in בַּקְבֻּק, “flask,” which gurgles when poured out. The verb here is the root of the noun פַּךְ, “juglet.” The verb seems to emphasize the small amount of water at its source, comparable in size to that from the mouth of a small vessel. (CC)

**47:3** The temporal clause בְּצֵאת־הָאִ֥ישׁ , “as the man went out,” uses the Qal infinitive construct of יָצָא with בְּ. By itself, קַו (used only here in Ezekiel, although common elsewhere) means a “cord, line” of any sort, but can also imply a “measuring line” (explicitly expressed by קָו־הַמִּרָּה in Jer 31:39). In 40:3, Ezekiel described the man’s measuring instruments as a פְתִיל־פִּשְׁתִּ֥ים, “linen cord,” and a קְנֵ֣ה הַמִּרָּ֑ה, “measuring rod.” The resultant measurement here is expressed in idiomatic Hebrew, אֶ֙לֶף֙ בָּֽאַמָּ֔ה, literally, “a thousand with the cubit.” A thousand cubits is about seventeen hundred feet, about a third of a mile or half a kilometer. (בָּאַמָּה is also used for “two thousand with the cubit” in Num 35:5.) (CC)

The expressions in Ezek 47:3–4 for the depth of the water, and especially “I was not able to cross” in 47:5 suggest that at each stop Ezekiel waded into the water to test its depth. The noun אָפְסָֽיִם in 47:3 is technically a hapax. It is the dual form of a presumed singular אֹפֶס. Since the common cognate noun אֶפֶס means “extremity, end,” the dual אָפְסָֽיִם naturally can refer to the ends of the legs, or the “ankles.” In the construct phraseמֵ֥י אָפְסָֽיִם , literally, “water of ankles,” the genitive (אָפְסָֽיִם, “of ankles”) refers to the extent or measure, meaning water that “reached up to the ankles.” Similar construct phrases with “water” will be used in 47:4, מֵ֥י מָתְנָֽיִם, literally, “water of (reaching the) loins,” and 47:5, מֵ֣י שָׂ֔חוּ, “waters of (deep enough for) swimming.” (CC)

Early church interpreters, taking their cue from the LXX readily expounded the river in Ezek 47:1–12 as a prefiguration of Christian Baptism. The LXX rendered מֵ֥י אָפְסָֽיִם as ὕδωρ ἀφέσεως, which may simply mean “water of a brook,” since the LXX uses ἄφεσις for a “channel” or “brook, stream” of water in Joel 1:20; 3:18; and Lam 3:48. Perhaps the LXX misunderstood אָפְסָֽיִם or used ἄφεσις as a close transliteration. In any case, the LXX could also mean “water of forgiveness” because the LXX also uses ἄφεσις to refer to “release” from bondage or “remission, forgiveness” of a debt. In the NT ἄφεσις usually refers to the “forgiveness” of sins. It was used by Christ in his Words of Institution for the Lord’s Supper: “this is my blood of the covenant that is being shed for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). It also refers to God’s “forgiveness” bestowed through John’s baptism (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3) and through Christian Baptism in Peter’s Pentecost exhortation “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the *forgiveness* of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). (CC)

**47:4** The translation is slightly free because of idiomatic differences between Hebrew and English, but the meaning is clear. The guide methodically measures off two more thousand-cubit intervals, and the water increases in depth to the knees and then to the waist. Instead of another construct phrase with “water” (as in 47:3, 4b, 5), the phrase מַ֣יִם בִּרְכָּ֑יִם, “water, knees,” is appositional, with “knees” as an accusative of measure or extent, “water” “which reached to the knees.” בִּרְכָּ֑יִם is the dual of בֶּרֶךְ, but its similarity to בְּרָכָה, “blessing,” gave rise to one minor LXX manuscript that spiritualized the phrase as ὕδωρ εὑλογίας, “water of blessing,” which of course lends itself to a baptismal interpretation of the river. (CC)

**47:5** *measured off another thousand.* For a total of four measurings (see note on 1:5). (CSB)

*river that no one could cross.* Amazing, in that a stream fed by no tributaries does not increase as it flows. (CSB)

After the guide measures another thousand cubits, Ezekiel declares that the trickle has become a torrent that he cannot ford. Many translations render נַחַל as a “river,” which normally is נָהָר in Hebrew. נַחַל usually refers to an arroyo or wadi, which may flow slightly year-round, but more likely will simply be a dry river bed except briefly after winter storms. In desert climates, such as that east of the watershed of southern Canaan, flash floods are not unknown when the water can rise precipitously in a narrow channel. However, this river is continual, deep enough to swim in, and apparently the current is too swift to allow Ezekiel to swim across it, so “river” is appropriate. (CC)

The syntax of כִּֽי־גָא֤וּ הַמַּ֙יִם֙ מֵ֣י שָׂ֔חוּ is compressed, but literally, “because the waters increased, waters of (for) swimming.” The same verb, גָּאָה, “rise up, be exalted,” is used in the Song of the Sea (Ex 15:1; see also Ex 15:21) with Yahweh as subject after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea but the waters drowned his foes. St. Paul offers a baptismal interpretation of that redemptive event in 1 Cor 10:1–2. The construct phrase מֵ֣י שָׂ֔חוּ, “waters of swimming,” is in apposition to הַמַּ֙יִם֙, but functions, in effect, as a result clause: “the waters increased (so much that they were) waters for swimming.” The hapax noun שָׂ֔חוּ is from the original root שׂחו, which became the verb שָׂחָה attested thrice in the OT: the Qal, “to swim,” twice in Is 25:11, and the Hiphil, “cause to swim; drench, flood,” in Ps 6:6. The final *waw* of the root שׂחו was consonantal but in the noun became the long *shureq* vowel.Presumably the river continues to rise until it reaches the Dead Sea. There is no mention of tributaries or another natural reason for the water’s increase, so obviously we are to think of supernatural causation. Hengstenberg comments:

We have here a representation of the Messianic salvation which, though at first comparatively insignificant, will continue to expand with ever increasing fulness and glory. Compare [Ezek 17:]22, 23, where the Messiah appears as a tender twig, which afterwards grows to a large cedar; and the parables of the mustard seed in Matt. [13:]31, 32, and the leaven in [Mt 13:]33. (CC)

Similarly, Keil cites Is 12:3 and 44:3 to support his view that the river represents the salvation brought by Christ: “The salvation which the Lord causes to flow down to His people from His throne will pour down from small beginnings in marvellously increasing fulness.” (CC)

**47:6** “Have you noticed, son of man?” draws attention to the miraculous increase in the river. Note that the guide addresses Ezekiel as “son of man,” just as Yahweh does throughout the book, indicating that the guide is a supernatural personage (see the commentary on 40:3 and on 43:6). (CC)

The two guidance formulas וַיּוֹלִכֵ֥נִי וַיְשִׁבֵ֖נִי, “he led me and he brought me back,” leave unclear whether Ezekiel was led back *to* the bank of the river or *along* the bank to an earlier location beside it. There is no preposition before שְׂפַ֥ת הַנָּֽחַל. Since the prophet had been in the water to test its depth in 47:3–5, it seems most natural to me to understand the guide as leading Ezekiel out of the channel up *to* its bank, understanding שְׂפַ֥ת הַנָּֽחַל as an accusative of direction. (CC)

**47:7** *great number of trees.* Reminiscent of Eden (Ge 2:9). (CSB)

The initial בְּשׁוּבֵ֕נִי is irregular since the form of its suffix (ֵנִי) is that for a direct object of a transitive verb, and שׁוּב is intransitive. Since the noun and adjective are singular, עֵ֖ץ רַ֣ב מְאֹ֑ד could theoretically be translated as “a very large tree,” but a collective meaning, “a vast number of trees,” is required by the following phrase, מִזֶּ֖ה וּמִזֶּֽה, literally, “from this [side] and from this [side],” meaning “on both sides” of the river. The LXX translates it ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν, and Rev 22:2 conveys the same point about the trees with ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν. (CC)

**47:8** *toward the eastern region.* Contrast Zec 14:8. (CSB)

The noun גְּלִילָה֙ (in הַגְּלִילָה֙ הַקַּדְמוֹנָ֔ה, “the eastern region”) is obviously a derivative of גָּלַל, “roll, be round,” and Josh 22:10–11 speaks of גְּלִילוֹת הַיַּרְרֵּן, “the regions around the Jordan.” The reference is probably to the deepest part of the Jordan Valley known today as the Ghor (“depression”), probably especially the southern end where the valley broadens out for several miles before reaching the Dead Sea, ground which in a larger river might form a large estuary. (CC)

*Arabah.* Here the waterless region between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea (see NIV text note). (CSB)

Today “Arabah” is used of the continuation of the Rift Valley south of the Dead Sea down to the Gulf of Aqaba. But in the Bible that word, עֲרָבָה, which basically means “dry/desert (region),” is used more generally of the entire valley from the Sea of Galilee down. If we include that entire distance, the river’s route hardly matters, but in actual geography, the Kidron Valley, into which water from the temple would flow, follows a very southeasterly direction for some time before turning and flowing due east into the Dead Sea considerably south of the mouth of the Jordan. (CC)

*the Sea.* Usually means the Mediterranean Sea, but here obviously the Dead Sea is intended (see NIV text note). (CSB)

*becomes fresh.* The Hebrew says, figuratively, “becomes healed.” That this lowest (1,300 feet below sea level) and saltiest (25 percent) body of water in the world should sustain such an abundance of life indicates the wonderful renewing power of this “river of the water of life” (Rev 22:1). (CSB)

“Healed” implies that the sterility of the Dead Sea is a kind of disease. Earlier in Ezekiel God had spoken of sending “pestilence, disease” (רֶּבֶר) as an agent of his wrath (e.g., 5:12, 17; 6:11–12; 14:19, 21), so this healing is the Gospel counterpart as God dispenses his grace. In addition to its literal use for the healing of diseases (e.g., Lev 13:18, 37; negated in Deut 28:27, 35 in the covenant curses), the Niphal of רָפָא can also be used for spiritual healing through the forgiveness of sins brought by the vicarious atonement of the Suffering Savior: “by his wounds we are healed” (Is 53:5). (CC)

**47:9** *Swarms of living creatures.* Overtones of Ge 1:20–21 point to a new creation. (CSB)

Especially the first part of the verse is reminiscent of Genesis 1, indicating that Ezekiel sees a veritable new creation! נֶ֣פֶשׁ חַיָּ֣ה, “living creature,” was in Gen 1:20, 21 (with the article), 24, 30, and the verb שָׁרַץ, “to teem, swarm,” was in Gen 1:20–21 (with the cognate noun שֶׁרֶץ, “swarms,” Gen 1:20). יִֽחְיֶ֔ה, “will live,” recalls the entirety of God’s actions in Genesis 1, where he created everything out of nothing and brought forth life where there was none before. (CC)

**47:10** *En Gedi.* Means “spring of the goat”; a strong spring midway along the western side of the Dead Sea. (CSB)

Especially the first part of the verse is reminiscent of Genesis 1, indicating that Ezekiel sees a veritable new creation! נֶ֣פֶשׁ חַיָּ֣ה, “living creature,” was in Gen 1:20, 21 (with the article), 24, 30, and the verb שָׁרַץ, “to teem, swarm,” was in Gen 1:20–21 (with the cognate noun שֶׁרֶץ, “swarms,” Gen 1:20). יִֽחְיֶ֔ה, “will live,” recalls the entirety of God’s actions in Genesis 1, where he created everything out of nothing and brought forth life where there was none before. ((CC)

*En Eglaim.* Means “spring of the two calves.” It is possibly Ain Feshkha, at the northwestern corner of the Dead Sea, though some suggest a location on the east bank. (CSB)

The location of En-eglaim (“spring of two calves”), possibly chosen for its assonance, is not so certain. For a long time, the favored identification was with modern ʿAin Fe’hka, just south of Qumran, today an Israeli resort. However, later discoveries in the caves south of Qumran from the time of the second Jewish (Bar Kochba) revolt (ca. 135 a.d.) indicate that on the southeastern side of the Dead Sea there existed a site called עֶגְלָתִן. Hence today the favored identification is with the Eglath-shelishiyah mentioned in the Moab Gentile oracles of Is 15:5 and Jer 48:34 in association with Zoar, although its precise location (and that of Zoar) in modern Jordan is unknown. This provides a much more powerful picture here because then, instead of two places by the northwestern quadrant of the Dead Sea, we have a topographical merismus, northwest and southeast, indicating that the healing extended all around the Dead Sea. (CC)

*the Great Sea.* See NIV text note. (CSB)

Finally, the variety of fishes will equal that to be found in the Mediterranean (הַיָּ֥ם הַגָּד֖וֹל, “the Great Sea”). לְמִינָה֙, “as to its [the fishes’] kinds,” clearly alludes to Genesis 1, where the noun מִין, “kind, species,” with לְ and various suffixes (Gen 1:11–12, 21, 24–25) refers to the great diversity of creatures, including fish, that God created, each designed to reproduce only its own kind (thus precluding the theory of evolution). The third feminine singular suffix on the word here (ָה) refers to the later repeated feminine noun רָּגָה, “fish” (דְגָתָ֔ם כִּדְגַ֛ת). The suffix lacks *mappiq*, probably because of the following initial *begad-kephat* letter ת in תִּהְיֶ֣ה. The plural suffix on דְגָתָ֔ם (“their fish”) could refer to the two places named earlier or to the healed “waters” of the sea or of the river (הַמָּֽיִם in 47:8–9), or perhaps to the dual “two rivers” (נַחֲלַ֨יִם֙ in 47:8), although it seems the fish are in the sea rather than the river itself. (CC)

**47:11** *they will be left for salt.* Perhaps to provide the salt needed in the sacrifices (43:24). (CSB)

(elsewhere only in Job 8:11; 40:21) is a “swamp,” which could be permanent in wetter climates, but in arid areas would soon dry up and leave a residue behind. Near the Dead Sea that residue would be salt and other chemicals. גֶּבֶא, “marsh,” is used elsewhere only in Is 30:14. לְמֶ֥לַח נִתָּֽנוּ is, literally, “for salt they are given” (Niphal perfect of נָתַן). “Salt” is probably somewhat generic for the raw material, which must be refined to obtain pure salt, and which (from the Dead Sea) contains many other useful minerals. (CC)

**47:12** *Every month they will bear.* A marvelous extension of the promises in 34:27; 36:30 (see Am 9:13) (CSB)

The guide concludes by returning to the theme of the trees growing along the river’s banks, partially repeating but expanding on 47:7. They are now described as כָּל־עֵֽץ־מַ֠אֲכָל, “every tree of food.” Miraculously, their produce will not be seasonal or periodic, but perennial. לֹא־יִבּ֨וֹל עָלֵ֜הוּ, “its leaves will not wither,” is the identical clause (but different word order) applied to the blessed believer in Ps 1:3 and contrasts with the metaphorical descriptions of apostates as withered leaves in Is 1:30 and Jer 8:13. “Its fruit will not fail” is the opposite of the covenant curse in Lev 26:20. לָֽחֳדָשָׁיו֨ יְבַכֵּ֔ר uses לְ in a distributive sense: literally, “each of its months it will bear early fruit.” The verb יְבַכֵּ֔ר, “bear early fruit,” is derived from the noun בִּכּוּרִים, “firstfruits,” generally considered the choicest and possibly the freshest, as RSV and NRSV interpret. The unusual placement of the prepositional phrase emphasizes the reason for the miraculous blessings: כִּ֣י מֵימָ֔יו מִן־הַמִּקְרָּ֖שׁ הֵ֣מָּה יֽוֹצְאִ֑ים, literally, “because its waters—*from the sanctuary* they are going out.” (CC)

The perpetuity of the trees’ fruitfulness recalls that in Eden (Gen 2:15–17) and anticipates that in the eternal garden paradise (Rev 22:2–3). What the healing waters from the temple do for the land, the healing leaves do for people. In Eden the forbidden fruit became an instrument of sin and death (Gen 2:17; 3:3, 11), but in the eschaton, the fruit and leaves of the trees will only be salutary. Therefore it is only a small step from the depiction of the fruitful healing trees in Ezek 47:7, 12 to their identification as “the tree of life” in Rev 22:2, 14, 19 (cf. Gen 2:9; 3:22, 24; Rev 2:7). (CC)

*The Boundaries of the Land*

**13 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “These are the boundaries by which you are to divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel, with two portions for Joseph.  14 You are to divide it equally among them. Because I swore with uplifted hand to give it to your forefathers, this land will become your inheritance. 15 “This is to be the boundary of the land: “On the north side it will run from the Great Sea by the Hethlon road past Lebo Hamath to Zedad,  16 Berothah and Sibraim (which lies on the border between Damascus and Hamath), as far as Hazer Hatticon, which is on the border of Hauran.  17 The boundary will extend from the sea to Hazar Enan, along the northern border of Damascus, with the border of Hamath to the north. This will be the north boundary. 18 “On the east side the boundary will run between Hauran and Damascus, along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel, to the eastern sea and as far as Tamar. This will be the east boundary. 19 “On the south side it will run from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah Kadesh, then along the Wadi of Egypt to the Great Sea. This will be the south boundary. 20 “On the west side, the Great Sea will be the boundary to a point opposite Lebo Hamath. This will be the west boundary. 21 “You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel.  22 You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.  23 In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance,” declares the Sovereign LORD.**

**47:13-23** This speech (47:13–23) is the first subsection of Yahweh’s testamental promise of a new land inheritance for his redeemed people. The heart of this speech is the outline of the land in 47:15–20. An introduction and conclusion provide a literary framework around the formal geographical descriptions in between. The introduction (47:13–14) specifies that Joseph is to receive a double portion, and the other tribes equal portions. The remarkable conclusion (47:21–23) grants aliens in the new covenant the same status as native Israelites, so that they receive an equal share in the inheritance. (CC)

**7:13** *two portions for Joseph.* Since the tribe of Levi received none (44:28), Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s two sons adopted by Jacob (Ge 48:17–20), each received an allotment (see 48:4–5).

The stipulation that Joseph should receive a double portion goes back to Jacob’s declaration in Gen 48:5 (cf. also Gen 48:13–20) that Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh would be considered sons of Jacob and each receive an inheritance equal to that of Jacob’s other sons, so that Joseph effectively receives the double portion normally inherited by the firstborn son. Therefore Ezek 47:13 is reflected in Ezek 48:4–5 by the presence of allotments for both Ephraim and Manasseh equal in size to those of the other tribes. While Levi does not receive an allotment of land resembling that of the other tribes, the priests and Levites each receive a portion of land within the holy contribution described in 48:8–22 (as previously in 45:1–8). Levi is included in 48:31–34 when each of the twelve gates of the city (the new Jerusalem) is ascribed to one of the twelve tribes. (CC)

**47:14** *Because I swore.* A reference to the covenant made with Abram (Ge 15:9–21; see Eze 20:5; 36:28). (CSB)

אִ֣ישׁ כְּאָחִ֔יו is, literally, “each like his brother,” but since it refers to the amount allocated to each tribe, it is translated “in equal portions.” “Lifted up my hand” is the idiomatic gesture for God swearing or issuing an oath, as in, for example, 20:5–6, 15. The gesture connects Ezekiel’s vision to God’s ancient oath, accompanied by this same gesture, to give the land to the patriarchs (Ex 6:8; Num 14:30). In spite of the intervening centuries of frequent apostasy, meriting the conquests and exiles of first the northern and then the southern tribes, Yahweh remains faithful to his oath by its eschatological fulfillment in the new creation after the return of Christ. (CC)

**47:15-17** The northern border begins at the Mediterranean, whose location is not in dispute (!), but other reference points are the subject of great debate. On Hethlon, Zedad, Beruthah, Sibraim, Hazer-hatticon, and Hazar-enon (sometimes Hazar-enan), we have no real knowledge. One suspects that the last three may not have been well-known even in Ezekiel’s day because of the descriptive phrases that follow each of them. According to some identifications, the places do not fall along a straight east-to-west line, but since all the other east-to-west tribal boundaries (and those of the holy contribution) are to form a straight line, we may assume that this ones does too. (CC)

**47:15** *This is to be the boundary.*† Approximates Israel’s borders at the time of David and Solomon, except that Transjordan is not included (see v. 18)—which, in any event, was never within the boundaries of the promised land proper. The following specified boundaries resemble those in Nu 34:1–12. However, these borders are not geographical lines of demarcation for an actual, physical, new homeland of Israel. The idealized promised land, which they define, is the prophetic symbol of a place and time in which the worship described in the previous chapters will be possible.

*Hethlon road.* Probably situated on the Mediterranean coast, somewhere in present-day Lebanon. (CSB)

*Lebo Hamath.* See NIV text note. Lebo, however, probably does not mean “entrance,” but should be identified with modern Lebweh, about 15 miles northeast of Baalbek and 20 miles southwest of Kadesh on the Orontes River, near Riblah. At one time Lebo must have served as a fortress guarding the southern route to Hamath. Perhaps the phrase should be translated “Lebo of Hamath.” It is often referred to in Scripture as the northern limit of Israel (see v. 20; 48:1; Nu 13:21; 34:8; Jos 13:5; 1Ki 8:65; 2Ki 14:25; Am 6:14). (CSB)

*Zedad.* Mentioned in Nu 34:8 but otherwise unknown. (CSB)

**47:16** *Berothah.* Probably to be identified with the Berothai of 2Sa 8:8, but otherwise unknown. (CSB)

*Sibraim.* Location unknown; probably the Sepharvaim of 2Ki 17:24; 18:34. (CSB)

*Damascus.* Capital of Aram (Syria); according to v. 17 it was included in Israel. (CSB)

*Hamath.* A city about 120 miles north of Damascus on the Orontes River. (CSB)

*Hazer Hatticon.* Means “the middle enclosure.” Its location is unknown, but it is possibly the same as Hazar Enan in v. 17. (CSB)

**47:17** The words גְּב֣וּל רַּמֶּ֔שֶׂק וְצָפ֥וֹן ׀ צָפ֖וֹנָה וּגְב֣וּל חֲמָ֑ת are, literally, “the border of Damascus and north, northward and the border of Hamath.” Following the LXX critics are tempted to excise וְצָפ֥וֹן as a partial dittograph of the following צָפ֖וֹנָה, although the Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate all attest it. In any event, the implication is that north of Hazar-enon lay both the border of Damascene territory and the border of the territory controlled by Hamath. In other words, the northern border running from the ocean just north of Tyre to Hazar-enon coincided with the ancient boundaries separating the kingdoms of Damascus and Hamath from Israelite territory. (CC)

**47:18** *eastern sea.* The Dead Sea (see Joel 2:20; Zec 14:8). (CSB)

We cannot trace the exact route of the eastern boundary between Hazar-enon (or somewhere in that area) and the point just south of the Sea of Galilee where the Jordan River clearly begins to form the eastern boundary (see below). Perhaps the Upper Jordan River, north of the Sea of Galilee, forms the northern part of the eastern border, or if the starting point was east of there, the eastern boundary must have run southward probably to the Yarmuk River (today the border between Jordan and Syria) and from there west along the Yarmuk to the Jordan. (CC)

*Tamar.* Means “(place of) palms” (see v. 19; 48:28); mentioned in Ge 14:7 (Hazezon Tamar) and 1Ki 9:18 (see NIV text note) and identified with En Gedi (see note on v. 10) in 2Ch 20:2. (CSB)

The exact location of this presumed “Tamar” is disputed, but a favorite candidate is ʿAin Hoseb, a short distance southwest of the southern end of the Dead Sea and commanding major trade routes. According to 1 Ki 9:18, which has תָּמָר, “Tamar” as a Kethib, it was in the Judean wilderness and a building site for Solomon, as recent excavations seem to confirm. (CC)

**47:19** *Meribah Kadesh.* A district about 50 miles south of Beersheba, identified with Kadesh Barnea in Nu 34:4. (CSB)

Most Hebrew manuscripts have the plural מְרִיב֣וֹת, “Meriboth,” in construct with קָדֵשׁ, but some have the construct singular of מְרִיבָה, “Meribah,” in construct with קָדֵשׁ. The Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate attest the singular here, which occurs in construct with קָדֵשׁ shortly in 48:28, as well as in Num 27:14 and Deut 32:51. מְרִיבָה is derived from the verb רִיב and means “strife, contention.” Because the strife had to do with scarcity of water and ultimately prevented Moses from entering the promised land (Num 20:1–13), the construct phrase מֵי֨ מְרִיב֣וֹת, “the waters of Meriboth” here (and מֵי with the singular in 48:28, as in, e.g., Num 20:13, 24), recalls God’s abundant provision of water despite Israel’s grumbling and Moses’ disobedience. Num 20:1 notes that when the incident occurred, the Israelites were camped at Kadesh (that is, Kadesh-barnea), the focal point of the Israelites’ forty years in the wilderness. Here (as in Num 27:14; Deut 32:51) the addition of “Kadesh” indicates the proximity of Meriboth to Kadesh-barnea. Kadesh-barnea is usually identified with ʿAin Qudeirat, one of the strongest springs in northern Sinai, today just inside Egypt’s border with Israel, and which has been excavated. (An ʿAin Kadeis not far away preserves the name of the biblical Kadesh but is a smaller spring.) (CC)

*Wadi (of Egypt).* The Wadi el-Arish, a deeply cut riverbed with seasonal flow that runs from the Sinai north-northwest until it enters the Mediterranean, 50 miles south of Gaza. It marked the southernmost extremity of Solomon’s kingdom (1Ki 8:65). (CSB)

**47:20** It would be possible to render מִגְּב֕וּל by supplying words, “[the border will be] from the southern boundary,” but, as in 47:18, more likely it means “*is* the border.” The border follows the Mediterranean coast north to a point opposite Lebo-hamath, obviously coming full circle. (CC)

**47:21** This first verse of the epilogue to the overall boundary description is an abbreviated repetition of 47:13, but uses the Piel of חָלַק with לְ, “apportion … give a portion to,” instead of the Hithpael of נָחַל used in 47:13. That the following verses deal with aliens or proselytes rather than hereditary Israelites may have influenced the change, but theologically the two expressions are virtually synonymous. With Yahweh as the ultimate owner, he may give a חֵלֶק, “portion” (whose plural is in 48:8, 21), to whomever he chooses. נָחַל simply accents the fulfillment of the ancient covenant promises more. Ezek 47:21–22, however, erases those potential differences by summarizing all who are to receive land as members of “the tribes of Israel,” even if they should become “Israel” through faith and adoption into the covenant of grace. (CC)

**47:22-23** What follows in these verses is unique—even radical, in a good sense—among the legal regulations of the OT. Lev 19:33–34 approaches it, but stops short of Yahweh’s specific application here. Ezekiel is sometimes pictured as narrowly interested only in Israelite problems, and indeed, as an exile awaiting a return to the homeland, it would be strange if it were otherwise. That charge can be countered in other ways also, but the clincher is surely to be found here. This section in Ezekiel substitutes for the attention given in the roughly parallel Num 34:13–15 to the allotments of land to two and a half tribes east of the Jordan—substituting a “fringe *people*” for a “fringe *territory*.” (CC)

Yahweh reveals to Ezekiel nothing less than an erasure of the distinction between the אֶזְרָח, “native-born” Israelite, and the גֵּר, “alien.” This is the only time אֶזְרָח, “native-born,” occurs in Ezekiel, but is common elsewhere in the OT. Various words could be used to translate it: “native-born, aboriginal, autochthonous, indigenous,” or the like. Ethnicity undoubtedly enters the picture, but to accent it raises the specter of racism, a relatively modern concept. Except for three passages (Lev 23:42; Num 15:13; Ps 37:35), elsewhere in the OT, אֶזְרָח, “native-born,” always occurs opposite the other key term in Ezek 47:22–23, גֵּר, traditionally translated “alien,” although that too can anachronistically introduce modern notions into biblical interpretation. Hebrew can use the cognate verb גּוּר, traditionally rendered “sojourn,” together with the noun גֵּר, “alien,” but “sojourn” probably conveys more transience than was necessarily involved. In earlier OT laws, we hear unremitting admonitions not to oppress the גֵּר, “alien,” along with widows, orphans, and Levites, whose status was about the same, and who were to be allowed to participate in the sacrificial meals in the sanctuary (e.g., Deut 14:29; 16:11; 24:17–21). Earlier in Ezekiel, God had excoriated the apostate Israelites for oppressing the גֵּר, “alien,” as well as the orphan, widow, and poor (Ezek 22:7, 29). (CC)

Yahweh had also warned in 14:7 that a person who apostatizes away from him and engages in idolatry, whether that person is from “the house of Israel” or is a גֵּר, translated “proselyte” there, will get no divine answer through a prophet. That passage supports the inference that during the exile, at least some non-Israelites had been brought to saving faith in Yahweh, perhaps through contact with the exiles (who included the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel), and they too needed to be warned not to fall back into idolatry. Such non-Israelite believers in the one true God would be roughly comparable to the σεβομένοι of NT times (“worshipers, proselytes, Gentile converts,” e.g., Acts 13:43, 50; 17:4). (CC)

In the preexilic period of Israel a גֵּר, “alien,” could not own land, so he was inevitably a second-class citizen. After Ezekiel’s ministry turned its focus to the future salvation (chapters 33–48), the question would have arisen as to the status of the “alien” in the coming restoration of God’s people. Ezekiel foresees full rights, not to any and all foreigners, but to those who will reside in the land of Israel permanently, marry, and raise children. In the context, then, “proselyte” (the LXX uses προσήλυτος in 47:22–23) or even “convert” might be a better rendition of גֵּר here. (CC)

The promise here certainly finds its fulfillment in the new covenant in Christ. Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ share equally in the divine inheritance by grace (e.g., Rom 1:16; 4:11–18), finally to be received in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21–22). St. Paul echoes Ezek 47:22–23 when he declares to Gentile converts to faith in Christ:

You were at that time without Christ, separated from citizenship in Israel, and *foreigners* [ξένοι] from the covenants of the promise … now you are no longer *foreigners and aliens* [ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι], but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household. (Eph 2:12, 19) (CC)

**47:22** *You are to consider them as native-born Israelites.* A gracious inclusiveness that went beyond the provision of 14:7. It reflects the same universalism that is found in such prophecies as Isa 56:3–8. (CSB)