The River of Life

Ezekiel 40-48 Part III

47:1 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. **2** Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

3 Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. **4** Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. **5** Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. **6** And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?"

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. **7** As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. **8** And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. **9** And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. **10** Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. **11** But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. **12** And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.

Ezekiel 47:1-2

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How Thirsty Are You?

"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of our God" (Ps 46:4).

As we come to the end of a year-long series on Ezekiel, my desire is to help you understand your need *of thirst*. Other than suffocation which supplies our need to breathe, thirst is perhaps our most primal human instinct. Thirsting for water, craving it with everything in your being, because you know that without it, you will surely die. Most of us have never been *truly* thirsty, not desperately so. Perhaps you've exerted yourself in a sport or gotten hot on a summer day. But you had your water with you. From this, you know a little bit about the remarkable feeling it is to revitalize your body when you are truly thirsty.

But this does not capture the urgency we truly all have to thirst and have it quenched. I thought hard about a story that might help you go beyond this. Three came to mind that I've heard about over the years. The tales are truly harrowing. In 1994, amongst the infamous Saharah's endless scorching dunes, Mauro Prosperi[1] staggered out of a sand

[1] Retold many times, a recent retelling is Kyle O'Grady, "A Story So Morbid, It Shouldn't Be On YouTube," *Kyle Hates Hiking* (Oct 30, 2025).

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blasting wind storm that the other runners of the 155 mile long race decided to wait out. Not Prosperi. For nine impossible days, lost and alone, his body wasted away—sunken eyes, cracked and bleeding lips, swollen tongue, skin like old leather, bleeding from nose and throat from the sand and desperately thirsty even as he drank his own increasingly black urine and the blood of bats clinging to the outer limits of life until by Providence and after traveling on foot *186 miles in the wrong direction*, he was saved by a small village in another country. In 1982, Steven Callahan[2] drifted for 76 days in the Atlantic Ocean in a tiny life raft after his boat sank, surrounded by an ocean of undrinkable water while his solar stills slowly failed and dehydration threatened to end him until he ran ashore some 2070 miles from where he first encountered the storm.

But perhaps the cruelest torment of thirst I've ever heard of belonged to a mountaineer high on a glacier in 1985, where drinkable water was omnipresent yet hopelessly out of reach. In the icy heights of Peru's unclimbed 20,814-foot

[2] Also retold many times. I first learned about it from "76 Days Stranded Alone in Atlantic Ocean Life Raft," *I Shouldn't Be Alive* (Oct 14, 2025).

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Siula Grande, Joe Simpson's world[3] collapsed in a single misstep. Having just made the first assent with his friend Simon, a fall during the descent shattered his right leg—tibia and fibula broken clean through the skin—leaving him in shock and excruciating pain with every step. Later, Simon thinking him dead in a massive storm and forced to cut the rope, Joe plunged into a crevasse, somehow surviving the drop onto a fragile snow bridge. Alone, desperately injured, and with no hope of rescue, he began he descended into the dark void of ice only to find an escape route! The agonizing crawl and hop toward base camp ensued—a mere five but impossible miles away across glacier, boulders, and treacherous moraine. Every movement was torture, but the mountain held one more cruel twist: he was literally dying of thirst in a place surrounded by water.

The dehydration struck with merciless speed at that extreme altitude. "The overriding memory," Joe later recalled, "is just feeling desperately, desperately thirsty. To the point where I felt I could smell the water in the snow around me." He needed liters of fluid each day just to function at that altitude, yet he had no stove to melt snow efficiently and no

[3] The story is recounted in Joe Simpson, *Touching the Void: The True Story of One Man's Miraculous Survival* (New York: Perennial, 2004). The quotes below are from the documentary *Touching the Void*, dir. Kevin Macdonald, featuring Joe Simpson and Simon Yates (FilmFour/Everest Entertainment, 2003).

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reserves left. Handfuls of snow only chilled him without quenching the fire in his throat. His tongue swelled, his lips cracked and bled, and waves of dizziness threatened to pull him under. As the hours stretched into a haze of delirium, the thirst became more than physical—it clawed at his mind, turning every thought into a desperate obsession for just one thing: *water*.

What made the torment almost demonic was the water all around him, close enough to hear but maddeningly out of reach. Beneath the glacier's boulders just below his feet streams of meltwater gurgled and rushed. "The agonizing thing," Joe later said, "You could hear water running. All the time. I'd fall over a lot and I'd hear water and I'd start digging around searching for it. Couldn't find it, couldn't get it. And it was driving me mad, to be able to hear water." Time and again he would collapse, digging frantically with numb, bleeding hands, only to find nothing but more ice and disappointment. The abundance denied was a cruel mockery in the midst of his greatest need.

This was thirst that unravels the soul. With no reliable way to melt enough snow—"It doesn't matter how much snow you eat, you just can't get enough water into your system"—and the glacier's hidden streams taunting him, Joe's

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strength drained away hour by hour. The five-mile journey stretched into an infinite span of pain and hallucination. He was surrounded by the very element his body screamed for, yet it remained impossibly inaccessible. In that parched desperation, the mountain exposed the raw fragility of human life—how quickly we can be brought to the brink when the water we need is so near, yet so far.

In that most desperate of thirsts, God's word confronts our deepest need. Many aren't yet ready, however. Israel and the nations weren't ready—not until 40 chapters of bloody warfare had been waged by God against one and all because of their great sin and treachery against him. Many of you have felt that pain for nearly a year in this book. Only when we truly feel our dryness, our famine, our desolation, our devastation, only when we see our wasting away and suffering do we cry out for what can save us. In times of plenty, many couldn't care less. It is desperation that brings thirst.

The utterly vital *good* news is that the water is there, ready and flowing only out of reach for those who do not thirst. The river of life bursts forth in Ezekiel's vision, bringing healing and abundance to all who come.

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Ezekiel's River

Ezekiel 47:1-12 is one of the most amazing passages in all of holy Scripture. It describes something so unthinkable, so inconceivable, so impossible that it could not be the product of any human engineering or building. It could only come from God himself. It is the chief reason why we not only should not be holding our breath hoping for a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem in our future (based on Ezek 40-48), but should be opening our eyes to its present reality that has already come upon us since the days of the incarnation and Pentecost.

After describing the totality of his temple-vision, in all of its exacting blueprint minutiae, the prophet is taken back to the door of the temple. This is the east door or gate, the main entrance of the temple. This is the very spot that Ezek 43:1-5 explains that God's glory reentered the temple after his long absence and that the Prince alone is allowed to enter to eat before the LORD (44:3).

As the prophet crosses the threshold, "Behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east)" (47:1a). Somehow, under the stone doorstep at the bottom of the doorway, the

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prophet *sees* ("Behold" Heb: *hinneh* is a deliberate call to "look") a visible stream of water flowing out from under the east gate.

Vs. 1b tells us where it originates. "The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar." The threshold (*miptan*) can be translated as "elevated platform." While it may simply be that, in ANE contexts it can also refer to the platform upon which the *king's throne* rested.[4] Importantly, in Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple, that throne was in the Most Holy Place with the ark of the covenant. This is where the Angel-LORD took his seat as King over Israel. However, in Ezekiel, there is no ark of the covenant mentioned, and in the parallel in Revelation, it is because the ark is now in heaven (Rev 11:19). This suggests that that the presence of God now resides in *the fullness of Ezekiel's temple*, even though it still has a Most Holy Place. And this seems confirmed by the fact that the Glory of the LORD enters right here and that the Prince eats with God right here where the water flows. In fact, this platform acts as a kind of pavement that

[4] Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. John J. Collins, vol. 22B, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2018), 262. Cook's entire discussion of this chapter is fantastic and I will draw from it in various places.

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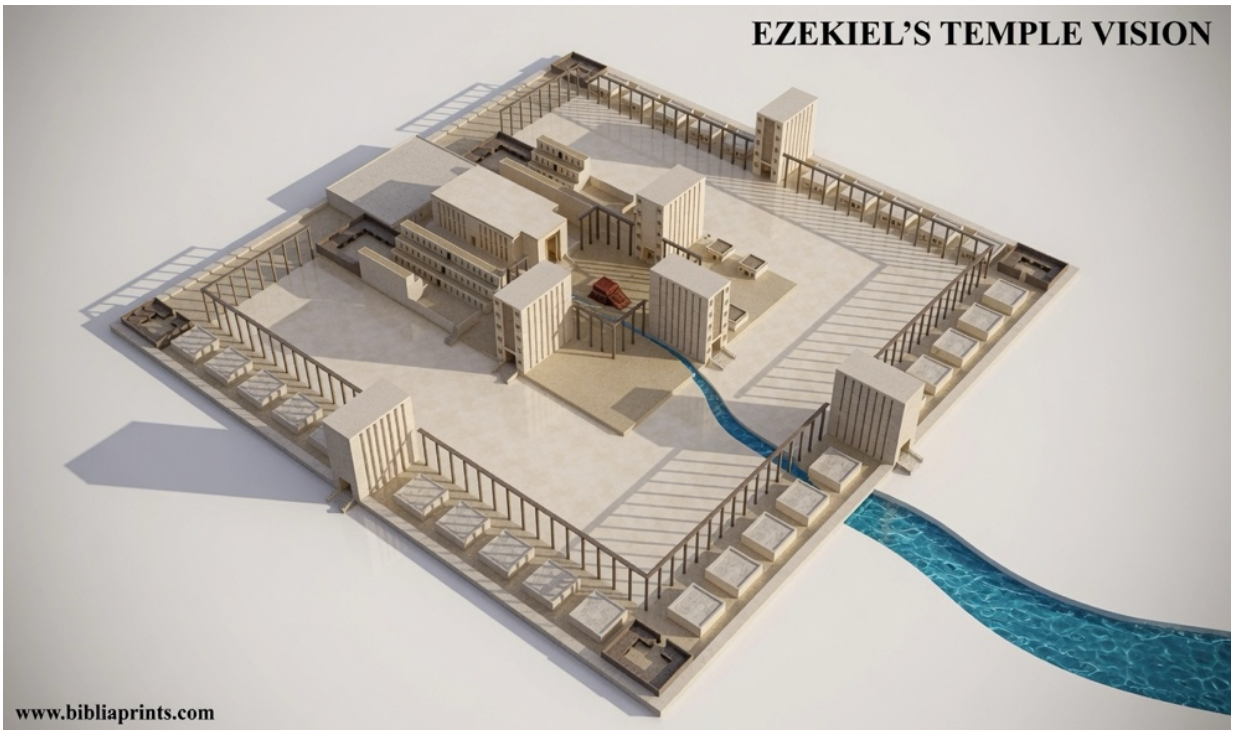
parallels the blue stone pavement beneath God's feet in Ex 24:10 when the 70 elders eat with God on Mt. Sinai. Meanwhile, "The altar" refers to the altar of sacrifice in the inner courtyard prior to entering the Holy Place. This stream of water begins at the place of atonement, substitutionary sacrifice, and reconciliation between a holy God and sinful people. Can you guess why?



The vision begins to help you understand. "Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was *trickling* out on the south side" (2).

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The north gate has consistently been the direction of evil in Ezekiel as north in general is in the rest of the Bible (e.g. Ezek 8:3, 14, 9:2; 16:46; 23:24; 26:7; 32:30; 38:6, 15; 39:2). The east gate is the direction through which you enter the temple, while the south of that gate means that stream flows right past the altar. Note that the water is a trickle.

The vision continues. "Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was *ankle-deep*" (3). This is the man (*ish*) whose appearance was like bronze at the very beginning of the temple vision (40:3). He had a measuring rod (a line of flax and measuring reed) in his hand by which he measured the temple previously. He is either an angel or the Lord himself.

The key here is what happens to the river. The man—the angel—walks 1000 cubits or about 1/3 mile. A cubit (Lat: *cubitum*, elbow) is a distance that originates in man himself. It is the average length between the elbow and the tip of the biggest finger (approx. 18 inches). Revelation tells us that the length of an angelic cubit is the same as that of a human one, and the Greek of Rev 21:17 appears to mean that they use our cubits to measure even in their realm, in

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my mind because as Leonardo DaVinci said, "Man [Human] is the measure of all things." At any rate, after travelling this far east of the temple, somehow, the river is ankle deep.

Now, I want you to understand something about both ancient and modern Jerusalem. *There is no such river on today's temple mount*. The mount sits on a ridge. The closest natural water source is the Gihon Spring, located at the base of the City of David, south of the Temple Mount, not on it and not to the east. Water has always had to be brought via aqueducts from the north and west and stored in cisterns to this part of the city. Furthermore, the stream is growing noticeably in the first 1,000 cubits. And that's the point. Yet, this is simply impossible in the arid climate of Jerusalem for this to ever happen by nature, even if you granted that a spring miraculously suddenly shot out from the temple mount. Springs give a steady amount of water, not an increasing flow. This is only heightened as we continue.

"Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was *knee-deep*. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was *waist-deep*. Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was *deep enough to*

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swim in, a river that could not be passed through" (4-5). This is so interesting, I thought I would ask the A.I. how much water increase this would translate into. It said, at the very beginning, right at the threshold, the stream would have been a modest but steady flow — perhaps 5–15 cubic feet per second (cfs), similar to a small mountain spring. After the first 1,000 cubits (~1,750 feet), when it reached ankle depth on a grown man, the flow might have increased to roughly 50–150 cfs. By the second 1,000 cubits (knee-deep), it could easily have been flowing at 300–800 cfs. At waist-deep (third measurement), we're looking at a substantial river of perhaps 2,000–5,000 cfs. And by the fourth measurement, when the water was too deep to wade and required swimming, the river would have been carrying an enormous volume — likely 10,000+ cfs, comparable to a major river like the upper Colorado or a large tributary of the Jordan in flood stage. Needless to say, this is exponential growth in just a couple of miles. How in the world is this remotely possible for a man-made rebuilt millennial temple in the future?[5]

[5] I suppose someone might claim that this river is a "miracle river" like when Moses struck the rock at Sinai. However, that river was temporary to get them through the desert. This one is permanent. That river was clearly a miracle; there is no hint in Ezek 47 that anyone performs a miracle. That river merely fed human thirst. This river, as we will soon see, literally makes a

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But we aren't finished with the vision. "And he said to me, 'Son of man, have you seen this?' Then he led me back to the bank of the river. As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other" (6-7). Nothing super exciting here, except, of course, that there is no such river in the real world. Other than that, it's quite expected to see trees along rivers.

"And he said to me, 'This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea" (8a). The sea here is not the Mediterranean, for the river is going *east*, not west. Arabah means "desert" from a root word associated with dryness, aridity, and sterility. The Arabah is the great rift valley that goes from the Sea of Galilee to the Red Sea, but the water terminates at the Dead Sea—the saltiest body of water on planet earth, currently at 34%, about 10x saltier than the ocean. If you can't drink ocean water without dying, how much more this place? It is so dense that you float very easily on the surface, but watch your eyes, because one tiny drop in them and you will pay for it. There is not a single higher form of life that lives in this body of water.

Dead Sea have no more salt and heals everything it touches. Clearly, Ezekiel's river is no mere river, not even a miraculous one. It is a spiritual river of life!

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Curiously, the LXX here says that the water goes both to the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, almost as if it splits apart into two streams, though it doesn't quite say that. Why would it do this? Perhaps a hint is found in the Hebrew *nahalayim* ("the river") in vs. 9. A *nahal* is a river. *Nehalim* would be many rivers. But nahal*ayim* is the dual form and means exactly two rivers, and this possibly influenced the LXX translator. Theologically, of course, extending the river to Galilee would mean that its influence reaching into Gentile regions of the Promised Land (Matt 4:15).

Importantly, the first time we read about this area of the Promised Land is Genesis when the kings of Sodom and the surrounding cities fled in a war and fell into bitumen pits (Gen 14:10)—the Israelite twin of the LaBrea Tar Pits of Los Angeles. These no longer exist today because the area is so arid. But in Abraham's day, Lot actually chose to live in Sodom, now located just to the east of the northern tip of the Dead Sea in a place called Tall el-Hammam, because it was "well-watered everywhere like the Garden of the LORD" (Gen 13:10). It was the cataclysm of Sodom that caused the region to turn into this parched thirsty desert

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from which it has never recovered.[6] Are you getting the picture of the kind of place this river is flowing into?

But the vision continues, "When the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh" (Ezek 47:8b). What? That's literally impossible on any kind of physical interpretation. But it's not finished. "And wherever the river [*nahalayim*] goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes" (9). This is not just saying that birds will fly from somewhere else to live here. It is saying that a place that has been utterly void of life for as long as humans have lived here will suddenly see new life being created and sustained. This is deeply comparable to the vision of the valley of dry bones in ch. 37. More on that later.

It continues, "Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets" (10a). En-gedi means "Spring of the Kid" and is a well-known oasis on the western shore of Dead Sea about halfway down its length. It is the place David hid from Saul.

[6] See Ted E. Bunch, et al., "A Tunguska Sized Airburst Destroyed Tall el-Hammam a Middle Bronze Age City in the Jordan Valley Near the Dead Sea," *Scientific Reports* 11 (Sept 20, 2021). For the location of Sodom see tallelhammam.com.

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Eneglaim means "Spring of the Calves." It's location is less certain but is likely on the eastern shore of the Sea, roughly opposite En-gedi.

"Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea [that is the Mediterranean]. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing" (10b-12). Salt could be a reference to the covenants of salt (Lev 2:13; Num 18:19), where salt was placed as a preservative on sacrifices, and thus the focus is on the blessings of the new covenant.[7] But the idea that it is in marshes and swamps honestly reminds me more of hell. That is, not everyone experiences the blessing of this river.

There is no such thing in this world as a single kind of tree—let alone "all kinds of trees" that bear fruit that never wither, never fail, and have new fruit every month. Much less because of a river that flows from the temple mount. No,

[7] Cook, 197.

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friends. This is a vision of something much deeper and far more significant than a rebuilt temple in our future. For this is a picture of something that only God can do. As Block says, it shows God's profound desire to restore a people's relationship to him, to bless them, and to do it as an act of pure divine grace.[8] But to appreciate this even more, and to get more specific, let's learn what else the Bible has to say about such a river of life.

The Waters of the Sanctuary

What is the first temple described in the Bible?[9] Most people don't realize it, but it is actually the earth-temple described in Genesis 1. The following temple-related words are used in the Bible to describe God's creative work: storehouses (Job 38:22), upper chambers (Amos 9:6), vaulted dome or *raqia* (Gen 1:6; Amos 9:6), doors (Ps 78:23), pillars (1 Sam 2:8), beams (Ps 104:3), *mikveh* (Gen 1:10), curtains (Isa 40:22), windows (Gen 8:2), separation of space (Gen 1:4), foundations (Ps 104:5), master workman (Prov 8:30),

[8] See his summary in Block, 701-02.
[9] This discussion is a summary of the middle portion and theological heart of Douglas Van Dorn, *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Pub., 2009).

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measurements and line (Job 38:4–5), building (Amos 9:6), fastening (Job 38:6), hammering (Job 37:18), lights (Gen 1:16–17), sea (Gen 1:10), beasts (Gen 1:24), plants and vegetation (Gen 1:11), and mountains (Amos 4:13).[10]

Importantly, water is already present at creation, but the picture is of chaotic waters surging without order or boundary. Yet the Spirit of God hovered over those waters (Gen 1:2), and God began the work of building his cosmic temple by bringing order out of chaos. On the second day he separated the waters with the firmament (*raqia*), and on the third day He gathered the waters beneath the heavens into one place—a *mikveh* (Gen 1:10), a ritual temple baptismal word here meaning a *gathering* of waters—so that dry land could appear. What had been disordered and uninhabitable waters were now ordered and given their proper place, named "Seas," as God constructed a three-tiered sanctuary (*heaven* = common, *earth* = holy place, *Eden* = most holy place) fit for his presence and for worship.[11] On the fourth day he creates the sun to rise in the east on his temple, and so on. This movement from chaotic waters to gathered and bounded

[10] See chart in Douglas Van Dorn, *Genesis 1-3: Creation*, Invisible Touch vol. 1 (Dacono, CO: Waters of Creation Pub., 2026), 116-118.
[11] For much more see Douglas Van Dorn, "Temple Building: Genesis 1:3-2:3," *RBCNC* (9-28-13).

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waters is foundational to the Bible's theology of the waters of life, for it shows us that God does not destroy the waters but redeems and orders them for His purposes.

This work God finished in six days and he rested on the seventh. Why rest? Not because he is tired, but because he has finished building his temple is about to be enthroned over it. Thus Isaiah 66:1 says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?" This is temple language.

This understanding of creation as temple-building also helps us make sense of certain ancient Near Eastern patterns that reappear, in transformed ways, throughout Scripture. In the ancient world, temples were often viewed as the architectural and cosmic center from which life-giving waters flowed out into the world. The temple was not only a place of worship but also the place where the waters of chaos were restrained and where fresh, life-sustaining water originated.[12] Ezekiel's temple vision picks up this same motif, but

[12] Cook (268-81) draws on several ancient Near Eastern sources, including *Gudea Cylinder B* (17.10–11), which describes the temple's vessels as carrying abundance like the Tigris and Euphrates; the *Enuma Elish*, in which Marduk releases springs from the body of Tiamat; and iconographic evidence such as the Mari investiture panel and statues of Gudea and Ea, which depict sacred rivers and flowing vases emanating from temples or divine figures.

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with a crucial difference. Instead of a static bronze sea representing controlled chaos waters in the courtyard, we see fresh water flowing dynamically from beneath the temple's own raised platform. The platform now acts the restraining device, what the *mikveh* gathering does with land and water and what the *raqia*-expanse-dome does in Genesis 1:6 as it separates the waters of heaven from the earth. What was once merely held back is now released as a river of life. In this way, Genesis 1 establishes the foundational pattern: God builds His temple by ordering the waters, and from that temple, life-giving water is meant to flow outward into the world.

The next temple we find is a kind of zoomed in temple from Genesis 1. This is found in Genesis 2-3. This temple is Eden with its three tiers: the unordered world, Eden, and the Garden inside it as the most holy place. We find here a door or a gate in the east that will be guarded by cherubim. We find gold in Eden. We find sacred trees in the Garden. One tree revolves around God's law (see Psalm 19). The other around life, just like we will later see in the Most Holy Place the Ten Commandments and Aaron's budded staff going into the ark of the covenant.

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But it is Eden's river that is our prominent feature today. Eden, the mountain of God as Ezekiel 28 earlier described it, has a glorious river that begins on its slopes that separates into four headwaters that symbolically go to water the four corners of the earth. This is the true source of the idea of a river of life, and it is without question that Ezekiel is harkening back to it in his description, as his river transforms the profane world outside the temple into a holy temple court teeming with life and trees that give fruit year round for food and leaves for healing. It's all very clearly Edenic imagery because Eden is the great temple God created on earth wherein his special presence walked with Adam and Eve.

It is perhaps helpful to spend just a moment considering Noah's flood and ark story as well. It is very clear when you compare the language of Genesis 1 to that of 6-7 that Noah's flood returns the world, theologically, to Genesis 1:2. But as the waters subside, and land once more appears, a dove—echoing the hovering spirit of Genesis 1:2 now flies out over the waters until it returns with a living olive branch to tell Noah that God's wrath is finally over. Meanwhile, Noah himself is saved in a three-storied ark which becomes for him

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the temple through which he is saved in the baptism that kills all living things on the ground.

After this, we find a surprising temple few consider. This is the Promised Land itself. This is the land of Canaan that God gave to Abram as a covenant pledge. Running down its center between Galilee and the Dead Sea is … a river with a valley like the Garden of God, as we have seen Lot proclaim. The Jordan which has inspired many songs over the centuries, will be fed by Ezekiel's eschatological river, at least in the LXX and together their waters will merge in a Dead Sea that gives way to great life. Canaan is God's holy place wherein he resides in the most holy city of Jerusalem in later days. But even in Abram's day, Melchizedek is already presiding over worship in Salem. That worship will later be carried on by the Zadokite priests in the vision of Ezekiel's temple.

Moses has several water themes. He is found floating in a little ark on the Nile as a baby. He causes the people to cross through the Red Sea on dry-gathered land that plummets down into chaos upon Pharaoh. But perhaps the greatest water idea is found when in the middle of a desert as the people are grumbling at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God causes

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water to issue forth from a rock. Importantly, Sinai has three tiers—the common space around the base where the people were, mid-mountain where the 70 elders ate with God, and the top where Moses alone could enter to be near the LORD as he received God's law and beheld his face. Also, we have a burning tree here in earlier days that was not consumed, but the Angel of God himself was in it.

Then we have the tabernacle that God told Moses to make exactly as directed. And Moses was praised because he did everything exactly as the LORD commanded. Later, we will have its permanent duplicate in Solomon's temple. Here, the temple idea is most recognizable. An eastern gate entering into a courtyard with an altar for sacrifice and a washing laver or great bronze sea for the priests. The laver and sea correspond to Eden's river, the Jordan, the water from the rock, and the chaotic waters of Genesis 1 and 7. But the laver and sea hold the chaotic waters at bay while also making them available to help in the transmission of holiness and life to the people through sacrifice. This is precisely what Ezekiel's river is doing as well, because they are all based on the same thing.

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What is that thing? It is the heavenly temple, the thing upon which Hebrews tells us the tabernacle itself was patterned. You see, no sanctuary in the Bible can be built however a person wants. No. There is a transcendent heavenly reality that all biblical temples are patterned after. After all, when Jesus died, he entered the heavenly tabernacle as High Priest offering himself once for all.

And yet, what is that heavenly tabernacle? While I do think all the prophets saw something tangible and there is a created place in that realm where angels administer and saints worship—for we see this in many places such as Isaiah 6, Daniel 7, and Revelation 4-5—ultimately, that heavenly temple is Christ himself.

Christ and the Waters of Life

The NT teaches us that Jesus is the tabernacle (John 1:14)—God dwelling among men, and Jesus explicitly said that he is the temple of God (John 2:19). Do you remember when Jesus died and the veil of the temple between the holy and most holy places tore in two (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45)? This veil in Jerusalem was but a shadow of the

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True Veil and Curtain. Hebrews says that Jesus opened a "new and living way" through rending the veil *of his flesh* (Heb 10:20). It is no coincidence that this veil tore at precisely the moment Jesus died, for when Jesus died, heaven itself ripped apart. God who is life paid the punishment our sin deserves through God incarnate's death. Jesus' flesh is the tearing of the veil, because Jesus is the temple of God!

Do you remember what happened when the spear went through his side just after he expired? The centurion was simply proving that Jesus was already dead (John 19:34). Yet, blood *and water* flowed like a river. Where? On the cross. What was the cross? It was the altar upon which the lamb of God was slain and the Great High Priest made the ultimate sacrifice once-for-all. Where was that cross? Just outside the holy city, right where the altar should be. Is it a coincidence that water therefore in Ezekiel's temple issues forth under the temple as that very temple keeps the chaotic waters at bay, and that it flows right past the altar on the south, only to finally make its way to the surface only after it has left the temple precinct proper?

Of course not, because Jesus' blood and water are the baptismal washing at his death (Mark 10:38-39; Luke 12:50)

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which make eternal life possible through atoning sacrifice. That blood and water was spilt so that we might be covered with Christ's righteousness and *life*! Do you remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well? "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you *living water*'" (John 4:10). "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will *never be thirsty again*. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal *life*" (14). Later in John we read, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (7:37-38).

This living water finds its OT picture in Ezekiel's river of life, which is Eden brought back to humanity. Therefore, the fact is that this river of life is Christ, even as Paul said that they all drank the same spiritual drink which was Christ (1Cor 10:3-4). If this water is water of life, then it shows just how parallel this river is to the dry bones which come to life earlier. What brings them to life? The Word of God. What brings the Sea to life here? The River. Same Person.

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Before concluding on just how amazing this is at the end of the Bible, let us one more time consider how Ezekiel 47 parallels in the chiasm of these chapters Ezekiel 43. Ezekiel's river is not the end of the book, but rather this river first issues out before the land itself is divided and purified. The river sets the stage for the land's cleansing and the inheritance of God's people. Cook says that the function of the river in which the stream comes from the House to heal the Land "serves a similar function in the text to the role of the Altar in Chapter 43. The Altar cleanses the House of the effects of chaos, while the stream heals the land … According to Ex 29:37 and Lev 6:27a (MT 6:20a), the altar conveys holiness to what it touches. But such contact, atoning sacrifices gain the ability to sanctify."[13] Hence, the river and altar are mentioned together also in Ezekiel 47.

But there is another parallel, one that we've already seen today. The glory of God goes into the temple at the beginning of that chapter. There, he dwells again, but now forever in his temple. But the Glory of God, dear friend, *is the Spirit of God*. Peter says that if you are in Christ "the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1Pet 4:14). The Spirit

[13] Cook, 272, 73.

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indwelling the temple thus also has its perfect parallel in Ezekiel in the river that goes forth and gives life. They are deliberately analogous. And is this not precisely what come together as Jesus talks to Nicodemus? "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The Spirit hovers over the waters in creation like a bird, even as the dove hovers over them in the flood and God hovers over his people in the wilderness (Deut 32:10-11), and the Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism. It's all the same picture.

But since Jesus is the true temple and the living water, we can now see clearly what all the types and shadows of the OT temples and their parallel water features are teaching us. It is in Christ that our thirst comes to an end, for it is in Christ alone that our sins are propitiated and forgiven. It is in Christ alone that we drink of water that will eternally sustain us. Why? Because Jesus is the River of Life that Ezekiel is seeing!

In fact, this is what Ezekiel itself as a book has been anticipating. Recall the very first chapter and how in the midst of this spectacular vision he sees one like human sitting on

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the throne in heaven! Who is this? Now we know for certain. It is Jesus. Jesus, the one who we hear about in that very chapter whose wings the living creatures emulate. "And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the *sound of many waters*, like the sound of the Almighty" (Ezek 1:24). Many waters? That's the River(s) of Ezekiel 47!

So the book comes full circle as the figure of the man turns into the metaphor of the water of life. But it's all the same Person. Our mighty God incarnate, the Lord God omnipotent clothed in human flesh and his glorious Holy Spirit whom he sent.

But it is not merely Ezekiel that comes full circle. It is also the Bible itself. At the end of Revelation, John gives us many allusions and echoes of Ezekiel 40-48. The most important for today are obvious. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God *and of the Lamb* through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, *the tree of life* with its *twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month*. The *leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*" (Rev 22:1-2). As you can now hear, this comes straight out of Ezekiel 47.

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Because it's the same river. Its just that now, the image of the temple has turned into a city. Why?

John tells you just before this. "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (21:22). And as Jesus said in John, so he says at the end of Revelation. "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" (22:6).

The only remaining question is therefore, are you thirsty? I tried hard at the beginning to cause you to understand your need for thirst. You thirst when your body is in need of its second most important element after air. You can't go long without water. The body fails quickly, within a matter of days. I fear that some here have gone far longer without the water of life. The woman at the well did not understand who spoke to her, until the gospel came and opened her mind. Then she thirsted as never before. She arose, left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:28-29).

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That is the question that is put to you. "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev 22:17). And if you do, and if you have, then sing the old children's song anew that maybe you never really understood as you can now, which captures it more simply and profoundly than anything else I can say:

I've got a river of life flowin' out of me
Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see
Opens prisons doors, sets the captives free
I've got a river of life, flowing out of me

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