

EZEKIEL'S VISION

Raven slid the curtain closed. The automatic light filled the dressing room. She moved slowly as she took off the hospital gown. She was tired and sore.

Raven was on her sixth week of radiation treatment, following her breast cancer diagnosis. She was grateful the doctors had caught it early—"stage zero" they called it. She didn't know there was a stage zero, but she praised God anyway.

She was struggling and thought about taking the rest of the afternoon off. Raven was grateful for the intermittent Family and Medical Leave time she had available.

Raven's mind went to her deceased mother, a twice-over breast cancer survivor herself. Her mother had advised, encouraged, and preached to her three daughters about going to college and finding a good job. "You never know when you'll need those benefits," she would say. Raven was happy, well-adjusted, and financially prepared for the unexpected.

She gave God all the glory for that! Still, she frequently looked back at how her mother had prepared her too. She had worked a job that didn't pay for sick or vacation days. There were many days when she went to work sick and tired. Now in her own career, Raven had earned three weeks of vacation and plenty of sick days each year.

"Thank you, Mom," Raven whispered. "I'm headed home and taking off the rest of the day. Because I can."

1 How can preparation help you to enjoy or make it through an event?

2 How do you feel when you attend a well-prepared event?

3 What are you currently hoping for, by preparing well?

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.

¹ The man brought me back to the entrance to 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 trickling 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.

A Deepening Stream

This chapter continues a description of a vision that is shown to Ezekiel, beginning in 40:1. Ezekiel sees a rather mysterious man—his “appearance was like bronze” (Ezek. 40:3)—who leads Ezekiel to a mountaintop to observe a restored city of Jerusalem. The spokesman (probably an angel of God) says to Ezekiel, “Tell . . . everything you see” (Ezek. 40:4). Even in the midst of exile and disappointment, God shows a hopeful message. Ezekiel sees a city set on a

hill—Mount Zion—where God has linked heaven and earth and placed His presence in a new temple. Ezekiel learns that the eastern gate to the sanctuary is locked forever, since God shall never leave (Ezek. 44:1–3).

The God of heaven will dwell in the midst of His people; and in chapter 47, the prophet sees trickling water coming from under the southern threshold of this temple's entry. The water is coming from the presence of God (Ezek. 47:12). The altar of sacrifice would stand in the outdoor court, so the waters dribble down “south of the altar,” flowing southeastward toward the Dead Sea (v. 8).

The man leads Ezekiel on a tour, all while measuring the length of the stream a thousand cubits at a time. A cubit is a measurement from the elbow to the tip of the longest fingers, about one and a half feet. Thus, four successive measurements total about six thousand feet. The stream grows deeper and deeper with each thousand cubits of its flow (vv. 2–5).

The image of miraculously deepening water, flowing from God's presence, shall be applied in many ways by later Christians (a symbol for baptism, the Holy Spirit, growth of the church). But the historical context is Judah's present situation in exile, where God's people are desperate to restore a temple to the center of Israel's spiritual life. This imagery reverses the vision of Ezekiel 8–11, where the prophet witnesses a heavenly chariot carrying away the glory of Yahweh (see 9:3; 10:4; 11:22–24). Now, in this vision of a renewed temple, God's life-giving presence is restored and secure.

1 What would coming to the temple mean for Ezekiel?

2 Why does the vision describe where the water flowed?

3 Why might Ezekiel point out that “no one could cross” the river?

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.

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.

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 Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty 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.

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 fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

A Healing River

Ezekiel now comes to the bank of the river and marvels at its life-giving qualities. When the waters flow into the salty Dead Sea, the sea itself becomes sweet and fresh: “swarms of living creatures” populate this freshened water and abundance prevails (vv. 8–9). This activity recalls the creation of sea creatures on the fifth day of creation (Gen. 1:20–23).

Many fruit trees grow on the river’s bank, and they have

supernatural qualities: leaves never wither, fruit never decays, and the cycle of ripening fruit is continuous (Ezek. 47:12).

Anyone who has visited the Dead Sea can attest to its briny bite. Though people love to wade and float effortlessly in its waters, nurses stand on shore to tend to those who get water in their eyes. Today, anyone who is temporarily blinded by the Dead Sea needs an extensive eye wash! Yet, according to the prophet, such waters have turned sweet and healing. The healing work of God flows unceasingly, ready to wash the whole creation in God's glory.

If the fruit of the trees "will serve for food," then the leaves of the trees will serve a medicinal purpose (v. 12). There is nourishment and healing for all. And never decay! Leaves normally fall from trees and wither on the ground, but in this new creation, the discarded leaves are purposeful and life-giving.

This vision—and those of all the biblical prophets—glimpses an earth restored, an entire creation renewed. The apostle Paul may have thought of this vision when he writes, "For the creation was subjected to frustration . . . in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20–21).

Thus, in a sense, the whole redemptive plan of God brings His people back to the garden. Eden, as it should have been, is a *restored earth*, where the memory of human weakness and doubt is overcome by God's saving work.

1 What are the effects of the river's water?

2 What might this reveal about God's attitude toward the earth's environment?

3 What does a captive people, like Ezekiel's generation, need from a deepening, healing river?

Waters of Healing, For and From God's People

The New Testament often picks up the imagery of flowing water as a way of expressing a fundamental truth about Christian faith: *abundant life streams from the presence of God*. For instance, in John 7:38–39, Jesus connects this flowing water with the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Later in John 19:33–34, the blood of Jesus flows together with water from Jesus' side when He is pierced by a soldier's spear. When Jesus allows Himself to be poured out, the mercy and power of God's Spirit flows freely into the world.

We know from 1 Corinthians 16:9 that the bodies of God's people are “temples of the Holy Spirit.” Through His grace and forgiveness, God sanctifies those in Christ as His dwelling place. And yet, if we truly wish to be like Christ, we cannot simply rest on our laurels and keep the gift to ourselves. Like Jesus, we must allow ourselves to be given for others, so that the love of God's Spirit might flow freely into the lives of those around us. This is how the world is changed: by God's holy people offering themselves in love, for the sake of the world. It is this openness that allows us to become temples, the sources of an ever-flowing river of God's mercy.

But that can feel costly! It can require us to give up our time and energy, to let go of trying to control the situation, and to trust Him to meet us on the way. Jesus shows us that, to be a channel of His peace, means entrusting ourselves to God. When we do, we find that our lives (miraculously) remain filled to the brim, overwhelmed with the life-giving grace of the Holy Spirit. Let us become these temples of God's presence, so that the life of God can abide in us and so that others can be nourished and restored.

1 Why is water such an important metaphor in Scripture?

2 What are ways that you have experienced God's restoration?

3 Is there anyone in your life who might benefit from your initiation of kindness toward them?

Water to Begin Anew

A nearly universal human need is to begin each day with a drink. In the week ahead, you are invited to begin each morning by drinking a glass of water. At the same time, you will pray for God to make you a vessel of His life-giving presence. Ask the following questions of God, and keep notes of any divine encounters prompted by God.

God, as I begin my day aware of Your presence and sustaining life, who shall you send me to fill today? Who do you need me to encourage? Who do you need me to restore?

Key Text

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.

—Ezekiel 47:12 KJV

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 fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.

—Ezekiel 47:12 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of December 1 through December 6

- Mon.** 2 Kings 22:1–10—God’s Word Reclaimed.
- Tue.** 2 Kings 22:11–20—God’s Word Leads to Repentance.
- Wed.** Luke 24:25–32—God’s Word Touches the Heart.
- Thu.** Nehemiah 8:1–8—God’s Word Interpreted.
- Fri.** John 5:37–47—God’s Word Testifies of Jesus.
- Sat.** John 17:14–19—God’s Word Is Truth.

Next Week: Psalm 19:7–13; 2 Timothy 3:14–17

We will continue to discuss the life that God gives. Can you think of times when wise instructions saved your life or kept you from harm?