

## Handout: Ezekiel Lesson 17

Chapters 46-48 address:

- Additional liturgical regulations (46:1-24)
- The river flowing out through the Temple (47:1-12)
- The division of the land (47:13-48:29)
- The gates of the city (48:30-35)

River of Life in Ezekiel 47:1-12	River of Life in Revelation 22:1-2
It began as a stream flowing to the east from under the Temple threshold (Ez 47:1).	The angel identifies the river as “the river of life” (Rev 22:1a).
The water flowed out of the Temple’s outer east gate on the right side (Ez 47:2).	It began flowing, crystal clear, from the throne of God and the Lamb and flowed down the middle of the new Jerusalem (Rev 22:1b-2a).
Every thousand cubits, the stream grew deeper as Ezekiel waded in the waters (Ez 47:3-5).	John sees the river but does not wade into it (Rev 22:1a)
It became a great river impossible to cross, and the guide placed Ezekiel on the shore (Ez 47:6).	John only sees the river flowing through the new Jerusalem.
Trees grew on either side of the river banks that bore fruit every month and with leaves with healing properties (Ez 47:7, 12).	On either bank were “trees of life” that bore twelve crops of fruit a year and leaves “which are the cure for the nations” (Rev 22:2).
The waters flowed east to the Arabah and then south to the Dead Sea which became purified (Ez 47:8).	John does not see the river’s destination.
Everywhere the river flowed, it brought forth abundant life (Ez 47:9-10).	The river will bring life “to the nations” (Rev 22:2c).
The marshes and lagoons will remain salty (Ez 47:11).	
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Take some time to recall the features that were unique to Ezekiel’s Temple as opposed to Solomon’s Temple or the Desert Sanctuary. You may recall the furniture in the Holy Place and Holy of Holies was a replica of what Moses observed in the heavenly Sanctuary (Ex 25:8-9).

1. There was no Court of the Gentiles or wall of partition to exclude Gentiles. The Gentiles were previously welcome in the Outer Court, but they were excluded from the inner courts on pain of death (see Eph 2:14).
2. There was no Court of Women (Outer Court and Inner Court only; see Gal 3:28).
3. There was no Laver for ritual washing (see Ex 36:24-27; Jn 15:3).
4. There was no Golden Table of the Bread of the Presence/Shewbread (see Ex 25:23-30; 37:10-16; Mic 5:4, Jn 6:35).
5. There was no Lampstand/Menorah (see Ex 25:31-40; 27:20-21; 37:17-24; Lev 24:2-4; Is 49:6; Jn 8:12).

6. There was no Golden Altar of Incense (Ex 30:1-10; 37:25-28; Zec 8:20-23; Jn 14:6; Rev 8:3-5).
7. There was no Veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Ex 26:31-37; Is 25:6-8; Mt 27:51).
8. There was no Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:10-22; 33:7-11; Jer 3:16, Jn 10:30-33; Rev 11:19).
9. There was no bronze basin for ritual washings (Ex 30:17-21; 38:8; 1 Kng 7:23-28).
10. There are major changes concerning the altar including its size and shape (Ex 27:1-8; 38:1-7; 1 Kng 8:64). In addition, stairs on the east side provided the approach to the sacrificial Altar. God ordained the priests to approach previous altars from the south by a ramp (Ex 20:26). In Ezekiel's vision, the Hebrew word "ariel" described the hearth or top of the altar, a word meaning "hearth" of God or "lion" of God (Is 29:1; Rev. 5:5).

Ezekiel's last vision from Chapters 40-48 generates many unanswered questions:

1. What is the huge, walled, fortress-like Temple so unlike previous Temples?
2. Why is there no Ark of the Covenant or High Priest?
3. Who is the *nasi* who functions as more of a religious leader than a civil leader?
4. Why the elaborate list of sacrifices that do not match the commands in Mosaic Law?
5. What is the purpose of the angelic guide who was continually setting boundaries and making judgments?
6. What is the significance of the wooden table-altar?
7. Why does the east gate remain closed?
8. What is the significance of the waters flowing out of the Temple?

Perhaps it is easier to discern what the visionary Temple isn't as opposed to what it is:

1. It cannot be the heavenly Sanctuary nor does it fit the description of the future Temple in the Book of Revelation. Those Temples do not need guard rooms and walls for protection nor animal sacrifices.
2. It cannot be the Second Temple the exiles will rebuild upon their return because the description and dimensions are entirely different.
3. It cannot be the Temple Herod expanded and renovated because it did not conform to the description of Ezekiel's visionary Temple.

The wooden altar-table (Ez 41:22), the closed gate that God passed through to return to His people (44:1-2), and the River of Life flowing from the Temple (47:1-12) are all significant clues to understanding Ezekiel's vision:

- The closed gate may represent, as the Fathers of the Church suggested, Mary's closed womb in her perpetual virginity. Once God enfleshed had passed through, no other mortal could use the same entrance to the world of man (Ez 44:1-2). Or does it mean in the new order established after God returned to His people that He will never abandon them again. Or is there a link to Jesus passing through the outer eastern gate on Palm/Passion Sunday. Sometime after the Muslim conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup>-century AD, the gate was walled up, but the angels at the Ascension and

- the prophet Zechariah promised God/Christ would return through the eastern gate in glory. Or are all of the above part of the significance of the closed outer gate?
- Jesus' table of the Last Supper was a wooden table that became an altar. The consecrated altar in every Catholic church represents the table of the Last Supper, Christ's altar of sacrifice that is the wooden Cross, and the empty tomb. As for the wooden altar-table, what is its significance unless it points to the foreshadowing of Jesus' Passion as He offered Himself in His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity at the wooden table of the Last Supper?
  - The River of Life that is reminiscent of the life-giving river in the first creation is the strongest symbol in Ezekiel's last vision that points to the New Covenant, a new creation in Christ Jesus, and a new, healing tree of life of the Cross that made possible the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the earth.

Does everything in the vision point to the New Covenant in Christ Jesus? Is it possible that:

1. Is the fortress-Temple the walled citadel of the Vatican, the home of the Universal Church of the New Israel? The Vatican is a walled religious fortress covering 110 acres or 4,736,121 square feet.
2. Is there is no High Priest because Jesus Christ is the New Covenant High Priest, and He resides in the heavenly Temple offering His sacrifice forever until the end of the age (Heb 3:1; 4:14-15; 7:20-21; 8:1-3; 9:11-14).
3. Is the nasi and are his successors Christ's earthly representative, the Vicars of Christ?
4. Do differences between Ezekiel's list of sacrifices and the Mosaic sacrifices indicate the end of animal sacrifice because the Christ will fulfill all sacrifices? Is it His nasi/chief that is responsible for seeing that His single but on-going sacrifice is offered on the altars of all Catholic churches in the sacrifice of the Eucharist? Is this why the text mentions only one Tamid lamb? St. John sees Jesus in heaven and describes Him as *a lamb standing that seemed to have been sacrificed* (Rev 5:6). The Greek word is *Arion Hestekos* that means "lamb standing." The Hebrew word "tamid" means "standing" as in continual or perpetual. Is this why Ezekiel saw a wooden table as an altar in Ezekiel 41:21-22? Was he discerning the future table of the Last Supper that became the first New Covenant altar of sacrifice where "the bread of the Presence of God" became the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ?
5. It is possible that the angelic guide and the River of Life represent God the Holy Spirit? It is God the Holy Spirit who gives the Church of the new Israel the judgments and boundaries for the New Covenant people of God to live holy lives in imitation of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.