

Talks – The River – myfishbites.com

River

I've got a few friends who love 'wild swimming' so that's swimming in wild places like on moors, in remote rivers, lochs, lakes and interesting places. You need to be a good swimmer, to have good kit and be wise but it can be an amazing way to see the world.

Ezekiel 47 is about a river and a pretty wild experience...

Read Ezekiel 47

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. 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.

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. 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. 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. He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?"

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. 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. 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. 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 Mediterranean Sea. But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. 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.

What was going on?

The context of these verses is a prophecy given to Ezekiel by God about the complete restoration of Israel and instructions regarding the temple, the land and the inheritance to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. No – this isn't just a talk about rivers, swimming or fishing... (sorry!)

Many people see this as a future prophecy about Israel in the very last days because God has not yet put his feet in Jerusalem and where he will live forever. (The name Jesus 'Christ' means King of the Jews – Jesus is a Jew and one day he will return to Jerusalem). In Ezekiel 43.7, we find that God's glory will return to the temple...

"Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever. The people of Israel will never again defile my holy name—neither they nor their kings—by their prostitution and the funeral offerings for their kings at their death."

This future prophecy stuff is really important and is well worth taking a deeper look at. However, this talk won't go into depth about this. Instead, we'll look to find stuff we can learn from this today in a 21st century context, especially relating to Pentecost.

Acts 2

In Acts 2.17-18, Peter quoted from an Old Testament prophet called Joel who had made this prophecy:

In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

Then in Acts 2.42-47, we read about some of the results of this prophecy happening in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit came and filled the house of the believers and then rested on them individually. What Joel had prophesied was coming true. Here's what happened to the first believers filled with the Holy Spirit...

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The Bible Journey to Acts 2

In the Old Testament, God chose to 'live' in the temple in Jerusalem. This was a temporary physical 'home' of God where the priest could enter and make things right between God and the people. God had written his laws on stone tablets with the 10 Commandments and Moses. But God's people sinned and fell away from him.

As God prophesied, eventually the temple was destroyed by the Babylonian people who God used to bring judgement on the people of Israel who had rejected him.

But God had a plan. Instead of writing his laws on stone, he would 'write' them on people's hearts. Instead of limiting himself to one physical temple, he would live in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6.19 says, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own."

This Holy Spirit would be sent as promised (in many places in the Old Testament) after Jesus had died and then risen and returned to heaven. This happened in Acts 2!

Acts 2 and Ezekiel 47

In Ezekiel 47, we see something similar to what happened when God sent the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of believers.

1. Water was coming from the temple. In many places in the Bible, 'water' is one of the ways that the Holy Spirit is described. Jesus had his side pierced and water ran out from him – his life source running out from him. Just in the same way that Ezekiel 47 talks about a future when the river pours out from the miraculous source in the temple, so the Holy Spirit did and still is pouring out in the life of believers today.

2. In the early days of the church, it was very small. The gathered believers didn't number over 100. Jesus had started with just 12 disciples. In Ezekiel 47.3 we find that the 'water' was only ankle deep, a little stream. Then in Ezekiel 47.4 we find that the water was knee-deep and then waist deep. When Peter preached, 3000 people were added in one day – this was the first great revival!! Over time, the church was persecuted and yet it kept growing, spreading from Israel to Gentile nations (non-Jewish countries). The 'water' was growing...

3. Sometimes in the West, we can lose sight of the fact that the church is actually growing. In fact, the church is growing faster today than ever before and faster than any other 'religion'. In some countries, 10-30% of the population is genuinely Christian – not just in name! In Ezekiel 47.5 we find that the 'water' had become a river so deep that no-one could cross it. One day when God makes everything new, we'll be amazed at how many people are in the Kingdom of God. In places like China, Iran, Indonesia, the church is growing so fast it's amazing. But let's not forget they face real persecution and we must pray for them, give to them and support them.

4. Next to the river was trees. Fair enough. But often trees refer to 'people' or even the people of God in the Bible. For example in Psalm 1.3, "That person (who delights in God) is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers." In Ezekiel 47.12 we read about fruit trees and find language like Psalm 1, "Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail." **What kind of 'tree' are you – one who is doing great things for God?** We also learn that the 'sea' will be full of fish – again, language that Jesus used when he called Peter and Andrew, speaking of a 'great harvest' – a huge number of people coming to faith in Jesus.

5. The sea in Ezekiel 47 also says about the fruit trees, "Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing." (This does remind of how Jesus cursed the fig tree because it didn't bear fruit despite being 'in season'. We also think about how the man who didn't use his gifts for God was thrown out – see Matthew 25). But where the church is full of the Holy Spirit and is living for God, we find that what the church does actually feeds people (Jesus said that his food is to do the will of God) and that there will be healing. This is one of the messages of the Gospel – healing between God and man, healing between people, healing in situations, healing in places. My church has recently got involved in Healing On The Streets – where people are prayed for and are healed – physically, emotionally and spiritually. (One church leader's leg grew out).

This is the power of Jesus – remember all this power comes from him not us!! God wants to use you to help make a trickle become a stream, a river and a sea. He started this work with the disciples in Acts 2 and now you get to play your part living for God and using your gifts for him, to bring new 'chapters' of Acts today – get writing and playing your own starring role in Acts 2011 and on...

End

Let's pray and ask God to help us, to heal us, to use us to change lives and reach people. Let's believe that even in your nation and in your life, God will bring a river into life for his name!!