

PM Ezekiel 47: 1-14 & 48 The End of Ezekiel - The Presence of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 September 2025

Preacher: Dr Alistair Mackay

[0 : 00] It is from the end of Ezekiel. Maybe not the easiest passage,!

Has been brought back in his vision to the door of the temple. 47 verse 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.

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.

Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits. That's about 1,500 feet.

[1 : 31] And then led me through the water and it was ankle deep. 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. And 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. 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.

And he said to me, this water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, the desert, and enters the sea.

[2 : 38] When the water flows into the sea, the dead sea, the water will become fresh. 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.

Fishermen will stand beside the sea from Engedi to Eniglam. 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.

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.

[3 : 46] Because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.

As we read on in chapter 47, we have a description of how the land in this vision is to be bounded, how far north, south, east and west it goes.

And then as we read into chapter 48, we are told how it's to be distributed and split up for the different tribes of Israel.

And then as we read on a little bit, we find that in verse 8 of chapter 48, in the middle of this land, adjoining the territory of Judah, verse 8, from the east side to the west shall be the portion which you shall set apart.

And this is about 6 miles wide, 25,000 cubits, and in length equal to one of the tribal portions, all the bits given to the different tribes, from the east side to the west, with the sanctuary in the midst of it.

[5 : 23] So there's a portion for God's servants in the middle, over and on top of and apart from where all the tribes are going to be.

As we continue, we get dimensions that describe a part within all of this which is really the temple grounds, the temple sanctuary.

And as we continue further, we come to the last little section of chapter 48, where from verse 30 of chapter 48 it says, and we're thinking now about the city in the middle of that country full of all the tribes.

These shall be the exits of the city. On the north side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates.

The gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi. The gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. And on the east side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates.

[6 : 50] The gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan. And on the south side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates. The gates of Simeon, the gate of Issachar, and the gate of Zebulun.

On the west side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates. The gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali.

The circumference of this city shall be 18,000 cubits. And as we now come to the very end of the last verse of Ezekiel, we have the climax.

And the name of the city from that time on shall be, the Lord is there. Amen. May God bless this reading of his word.

Let's be fair to say that we do need help from above when we consider the book of Ezekiel, which is sometimes a little murky as far as our thinking is concerned.

[8 : 03] But you know, when I embarked on this bookends, as I've called it, series of reflections at the start of this year, I really had no idea of the journey that these studies would involve for myself, never mind whoever else might be listening to these thoughts.

I hadn't, to begin with at least, grasped that the principal message from the end of the book of Matthew that we thought about this morning and the principal message from the end of the book of Ezekiel are in fact one and the same.

Matthew ends with the assertion of the risen Lord Jesus that he is with us always, even to the end of the age. And Ezekiel finishes with that wonderful name that adorns the rebuilt city which Ezekiel saw.

The Lord is there. So assurance about the presence of Jesus ends Matthew and about the presence of God ends Ezekiel.

And could it be that other books close with the very same message? Oh yes they do. So do we need any more evidence that this particular message is important?

[9 : 29] Now it's inevitable as you and I read this word Ezekiel 47 and 48 tonight it might seem a little abstruse and we're looking to see how this could possibly have relevance to us because I'm here now in need of all sorts.

Can this word from the Almighty speak into my current needs? Well of course the answer is unequivocally yes. The very fact that God has brought about the existence of scripture and been the architect of its availability for us to read is just so that this God breathed word which can make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus is indeed useful for teaching us rebuking us correcting us training us in righteousness so that as it says in 2 Timothy 3 the man and woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

But the depths of our understanding and the richness of the instruction for our own lives are enhanced if we take time to look at what this the Lord is there with which the book ends what that meant to Ezekiel himself and to the exiled captive Jews.

You see Ezekiel had committed these words in writing and for the large part those people who received it it was read to them because few of them could read for themselves.

Rightly or wrongly I have this picture in my mind's eye of the writings of Ezekiel being rehearsed and recited throughout Babylonian Jewry and we're in the first half of the 6th century BC in the same way we might hum or sing or karaoke a popular tune nowadays.

[11 : 49] I'm not sure there's a lot of karaoke here tonight but who knows. And that would be without necessarily being able to read the musical score or play a musical instrument or indeed being able to vocalize it with any great musicality.

In fact we might not even understand what all the lyrics mean but we do get the gist of the meaning and the tenor of the song and it's the hot topic of conversation.

but when we get into this our recall of this part of Israel's history is often a bit dry maybe even a bit muddled.

We know of the succession of kings and commoners doing evil in the sight of the Lord and the main from Solomon onwards. We know of the succession of prophets over the next 400 years or so who proclaimed the inevitable consequences of unrepented and indeed vaunted sin and we know that according to God's plans and purposes the northern kingdom of Israel was annihilated by the Assyrians in 722 BC and then Jerusalem was overrun by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian hordes at the turn of the 6th century before our Lord Jesus came in the flesh and we know that there are three waves three tranches of exiles who were removed from Israel to Babylon maybe three months walk away from Jerusalem but that God's promise through the prophet Jeremiah was that when 70 years of exile had been accomplished there would be a return of the exiles and that was indeed precisely what happened under Zerubbabel as we have it recorded in the early part of the book of Ezra that's fine but we miss a lot from thinking purely in those kind of historical summary terms what must it have been like to live in Judah in those days at the end of the 7th century BC 620 BC and onwards Judah the southern kingdom had a real gallusness a kind of cocky arrogance that they were the people they were the chosen ones they were that they enjoyed God's particular favour and blessing that they had continued the Davidic line of succession in their kings and they had Jerusalem where God had chosen to dwell as the capital of their political and religious life so nothing nothing bad would befall them no matter what idolatry and crass behaviour they got up to it wasn't even a let sin abound so that grace would abound even more attitudes they hadn't got that far in their thinking it was a kind of unthinking religious racial supremacy no matter what they did they were invincible untouchable it wasn't that they weren't told that such an attitude and such idolatrous behaviour would have dire consequences

[15:32] Isaiah Jeremiah Zephaniah Micah Habakkuk and so on as my old mother would have said their tongues were thin telling them they just didn't believe it and so when deportation and exile befell them at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and his troops they were in shock they were in denial they couldn't get their heads round it and the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC the place where God chose to dwell was just unthinkable yet it happened some of them the third tranche of exiles they saw Jerusalem with their own eyes reduced to rubble just as we see Gaza reduced to rubble today the merciless and total annihilation of a physically beautiful place so it wasn't just bad enough that the brightest and best of the leaders and up and coming intellectuals were swept off to

Babylon in tranche number one in 605 BC that was Daniel Shadrach Meshach and Abednego with others then that all the people of any standing and education were deported in tranche two and 597 BC but the very buildings of Jerusalem were razed to the ground and the temple the very temple of Solomon was broken down burned looted and any remaining people of any substance were dragged off to Babylon in 586 BC the people were uprooted bewildered broken bereft promises and dreams and birthright it seemed shattered they were depressed hopeless and this was equally true of those who'd arrived in Babylon in the first two waves of exiles and this was the people to whom Ezekiel ministered a broken people unable to come to terms with the reality of their punishment and fall from God's grace and it's apparent from the earlier chapters of Ezekiel that even in their exile and punishment the Jewish sense of entitlement was such that they thought that at any moment God would overthrow

Babylon with a mighty hand a stretched out arm and any repentance they professed was sham to begin with the insincere expression of repentance had almost become an art form the very hallmark of Judah Jeremiah chapter 3 verse 10 says yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart but in pretense declares the Lord and oh is that not a stirring warning for ourselves just how pretense repentance is our repentance there is much to think about there this was after all the people of God the people of the covenant the people who had the scripture the people who had the temple the people who had the promises and their attitude to God was false it was all pretense but the disaster you know that went further even than dislocation to Babylon for that remnant of the exiled Jews who remained faithful to

God excuse me God always has his remnant his 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal as it was in Elijah's time the greater disaster for God's remnant was that that exile was the reversal of history with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm God had delivered the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt by the hand of Moses and Aaron and after a punishing 40 years they entered the promised land began to take control of it that land flowing with milk and honey but they never had full control of the land because of disobedience to God's commands they made treaties with some of the nations of Canaan they intermarried with the nations there they came under the influence and

curse of heathen gods but the whole history was of God's forbearance with his errant people and gradually they came to a state of peace and prosperity unity under David and Solomon but now the whole process was going into reverse the whole people was leaving the promised land honey and milk in reverse three months walk away from Jerusalem from Zion and to crown it all the glory of the Lord departed from Jerusalem Ezekiel had that awesome vision of the glory of God at the start of his book a vision that was as distressing as it was gloriously splendid because he saw that glory described in such awesome almost psychedelic terms that glory leaving Israel and what was to fill the vacuum that had been left loved and here he was called to minister to that dislocated appalled uncomprehending people well

[21 : 56] Ezekiel had not had it easy early in his life maybe he had because he was from a priestly family and so he was well educated and had led a relatively privileged life in his formative years but then he began his own priestly training and that should have taken 10 years beginning age 20 concluding at age 30 of course the very age that the Lord Jesus himself began his ministry as our high priest but halfway through his training Ezekiel was uprooted to Babylon in 597 so not only could he not complete his formal training because that was linked in all sorts of ways to the temple in Jerusalem but the administration of the sacrificial observances depended on the temple and on those temple courts and the altar and the presence of the

Almighty Ezekiel must have been bereft even though God blessed him with a new calling as prophet to the exiled people what a job he had convincing the exiles of the reality of their sin and of their godlessness the message is so stark the New Testament equivalent is in Ephesians chapter 2 and that's it's so painfully blunt about their and our condition if we've not asked the Lord Jesus into our lives the description there is without hope and without God in the world there's no darker verse in scripture than that we can have all the riches in the world we can have accolades from our fellow humans banquets laid on we can have untold power such that at the press of a button we could annihilate nations with nuclear power indeed we could gain the whole world but if we lose our soul in the process if we have no relationship with the

God who created us if we are without God in the world then we are without hope we're in the darkness we're heading for a lost eternity it is only Jesus the light of the world who can change that so the picture of these appalled lost unrepentant Jewish exiles is our picture without Christ who is our life our hope and our all well the first 24 chapters of the prophecy lay it on the line for the exiles then personal disaster strikes Ezekiel in chapter 24 we learn of the premature death of Ezekiel's wife symbolic of the death and fall of Jerusalem itself could things get any worse

Ezekiel must have been broken he must have felt the words of Isaiah's prophecy echoing in his own life as God spoke through Isaiah I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good following their own devices a people who provoke me to my face continually or as lamentations one says what sorrow is like my sorrow so chapters 1 to 24 outline messages of judgment against Israel and Judah though the next eight chapters outline judgment against those nations who have been involved in delivering that same judgment of Israel and Judah because of their own sin their obvious delight in inflicting pain on Judah and their godless attitude could it be we see such attitudes in some places in our world today a delight in inflicting pain maybe we should pause there for a wee minute to consider where we fit in in this timeless evaluation of fallen humanity are we steeped in our sins are we in denial about our failing to get even close to God's reasonable standards standards expected to be met in our behaviour and in our obedience is it our habit to look at our background our sound grounding in the truth at our ecclesiastical heritage and privilege and think that somehow we are above reproach are we the people as Judah thought she was Psalm 95 verse 6 reminds us oh come let us worship and bow down let us kneel before the Lord our maker for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as at Meribah and so on the day at Massa in the wilderness when your fathers put me to the test says God and put me to the proof though they had seen my work for 40 years

[28 : 03] I loathed that generation and said they are a people who go astray in their heart and they have not known my ways therefore I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest this is profoundly solemn daily we should be seeking God's face and favour confessing our sins with genuine confession and repentance acknowledging how far we fall in thought and word and action but rejoicing that if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness what a saviour we have so after the denouncement of sin and declaration

of just judgment and punishment chapters 1 to 32 ezekiel's prophecy assumes the pattern of other prophets isaiah jeremiah and so on they follow judgment against sinful israel judgment against sinful nations but then messages of consolation for god's chosen people comfort ye comfort ye my people saith the lord chapters 33 to 48 see ezekiel's call as a watchman for israel renewed then news of the fall of jerusalem is ratified and the exiles condemned afresh for their fake repentance before we have the beautiful picture painted of the covenant lord as the shepherd of his people and restoration and renewal is announced the dry bones of chapter 37 come to life and god's people are predicted as united as one nation under one king though there are battles to be fought in chapters 38 and 39 but you know as you read through the book you get a feeling that we're building to a climax the pace accelerates things are happening and restoration of divine relationship with israel is forming in front of our eyes and you kind of hold your breath could this be true but you know as far as ezekiel's immediate audience was concerned i suspect the fine detail may have passed them by a bit they just wanted to go home but as time went by and the 70 years of exile were fulfilled and when through god's intervention cyrus decreed that judah should be repatriated in the event it was only a small minority of the exiles who returned on that three month journey to jerusalem the rest had become quite comfortable where they were thank you very much in the early days after jerusalem's fall the yearning to return was much greater now i am no guru in the interpretation of prophecy and my own understanding of chapters 40 to 48 may be very simplistic and especially if you are a guru but one thing that will give us all a monumental headache is to try to interpret these chapters literally that is a

literal temple and literal division of the land either now or at some point in the future the land of israel to which the exiles returned and the temple and city whose reconstruction was supervised by zerubbabel ezra and nehemiah bore no resemblance to ezekiel's description and the division of the land was like slats on a venetian blind horizontally between the jordan valley and the mediterranean and that makes no sort of literal geographical or topographical sense whatsoever however what we do have are glorious principles which enlighten our minds and rejoice our hearts when we view them in the richness of their symbolism the subject is restoration being made right with god here are a few thoughts about this as we draw towards a conclusion our shorter catechism articulates that man's chief ends to glorify god and enjoy him forever now to the jews of ezekiel's day that glorifying and joying found its greatest expression in the temple and so restoration of relationship and proper worship needed that temple focal point chapters 40 to 42 describe the new temple in great detail a place of wonder and of symmetry and craftsmanship and dedication a place fit for god to dwell but secondly in chapter 43 the glory of god returns to that temple coming from the east chapter 43 verse 1 his voice was like the roar of rushing waters oh does this sound like revelation 1 and the land was radiant with his glory the vision ezekiel tells us was just like the one he had at the kibar river where the glory departed but no more the glory is back son of man god said this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet this is where i will live among the israelites forever who could not get more present than the place of the soles of the feet and of that glory john 1 and 14 tells us the word that is jesus became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth and hebrews 1 and 3 tells us jesus is the radiance of the glory of god and the exact imprint of his nature and he upholds the universe by the word of his power and 2 corinthians 4 and 6 says for god who said let light shine out of darkness as shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of god in the face of jesus christ ezekiel 43 is indeed the gospel according to ezekiel and it speaks so powerfully if we have the eyes to see it of the second person of the trinity who was yet to come the third thing is we have a holy god in a holy temple and in chapters 43 and 44 a holy altar where holy sacrifice is made and where a holy people serve their god with holy lives

according to god's holy ordinances that's a lot of holiness ezekiel didn't know this of course but we do that the lord jesus holy harmless undefiled and separate from sinners was the very embodiment of holiness he was the once for all sacrifice offered up on Calvary on Mount Moriah the very place where this new temple was being built the substitute promised even from Abraham's time onwards and fourthly all of this is set in a holy land chapters 45 and 46 where holy days are commemorated in a God glorifying and God enjoying way the festivals and the sabbaths how much time do we devote to our

God an occasional day every Sunday or our whole lives we hear of whole life sentences being handed down to the perpetrators of particularly heinous crimes times but when we come to Christ

Jesus we have a whole life order handed down of love and willing service because Christ took the punishment for our heinous crimes and then fifthly we have then that glorious chapter 47 that we read together where we see flowing from the temple from under the threshold of the temple water that increases in volume and depth and flows away to the east nourishes the desert even into the dead sea that then supports fresh water teeming with life now how remarkable to a Jew was that you see unlike most other major cities this most cities are built in a river London the Thames Paris the Seine Rome the Tiber Babylon the Euphrates so on Jerusalem had no source of water it had no river and that's what made it so vulnerable to siege and why Hezekiah commissioned the building of a tunnel from the upper Gion Springs to within the city walls but here in Ezekiel's vision the very temple is the source of boundless water pure clean life giving water healing water and it may well be that the Lord Jesus had this picture of the water flowing from under the threshold of the temple when He spoke from the temple in John 7 on that last that greatest day of the feast it says on the last day of the feast that great day

[39 : 20] Jesus stood up and cried out 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 now this he said about the spirit whom those who believed in him were to receive for as yet the spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified and then in chapter 48 we realise that's a place for everyone of all the tribes of Israel within this reallocated land there are no stravegers on the east side of the Jordan everyone accommodated within the holy land and each tribe has its own gate into the city so there's no competition for access to the city and the temple precincts there is such a sense of complete greatness and lack of exclusion in these arrangements and we've got something else remarkable the first city recorded in scripture goes back to Genesis 4 17 because there

Cain was judged by God and he was sentenced to life in the land of Nod of wandering the land of wandering literally but Cain of course knew better and he started it says to build a city seems like cities are another mark of human fallenness but here we have a holy city a redeemed city if you like housing the holy temple in a holy land just how gracious is the redemptive heart of our almighty God as you can imagine there are many close parallels between Ezekiel and the book of Revelation I won't even attempt to make comparisons this evening but what we can do is have before our minds this description of Ezekiel's of the restored worship of God so that

God's chosen created children his children of the promise the spiritual Israel who have fallen from grace through sin committing what should not have happened sin omitting to do the things that should have been done and sin in our fallen nature in Adam but the spiritual Israel restored by the grace of God and the blood of God's sinless son shed on Calvary the spiritual Israel this spiritual Israel has unrestricted access to the heavenly father through the veil of the temple torn in two from top to bottom and there's no problem getting into the temple because there's a gateway for everyone and Jesus is the gate he told us that himself he's also the water of life with God's love as in

Romans 5 poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us and this sanctified city is the gathering together of people from every nation and people and tongue and tribe who worship the Lamb and who are saved through his blood Paul even elevates our thoughts further and presents us with the incredible truth that the temple is actually made up of people redeemed people God's people where God the Father and God the Son live in the hearts of his special purchased people by the presence of the Holy Spirit it because ultimately the conclusion of Ezekiel is the conclusion of anything and everything meaningful it's the conclusion of Matthew and Exodus and Revelation it's Jehovah

Shammah the Lord is there no other book ends with a title like this no other book ends with capital letters in most versions like this no other book has a clearer conclusion than this by the way have you noticed that Revelation 21 doesn't mention a temple in the New Jerusalem because the city itself is the temple and the temple is the city it is God's presence that we crave we would see Jesus and it will take eternity to take it all in but that's where Jesus is and that will do fine the Lord is there the covenant Lord is there the promised one is there the fulfillment of all the promises is there our beloved

[44 : 58] Jesus is there nothing else really matters because you see the lamb is all the glory in Emmanuel's land let's pray together heavenly father forgive our muddled thinking as we read your word it is so profound and so beautiful and we pray we would lay it up in our hearts and realise just how precious is your word we thank you that you assure us again and again that you are there that

you love us you gave your son for us and that the promise is that we will spend eternity marvelling at praising worshipping the lamb the lamb is all the glory in Emmanuel's land so heavenly father help us tonight to be greatly encouraged that even in the complexity of prophecy and things we find hard to understand the message is clear that you are there you were there and you will be there and that nothing will separate us from your loving

Christ Jesus we thank you for the promise of a time coming when we will be with him when we will see him as he is comfort our hearts give us wisdom and grace to follow you closely love you dearly and we thank you that that cleansing water that Holy Spirit who has been given and promised and has come just as Jesus said to live in our hearts oh we pray father that the spirit himself would teach us and enliven us and empower us so that we may glorify you and enjoy you forever in Jesus name Amen