

# Roland Burrows, 27 June 2021

## Ezekiel 47: The Abounding Grace of God Overview of the book of Ezekiel

### *Who was Ezekiel?*

The name Ezekiel means “the strength of God” or “God strengthens”. He is a priest (ch.1 v3) who if not for the exile would have been serving in the temple. He is “the son of Buzi”, a name which means “despised”. Some say “Buzi” could be Jeremiah, his predecessor as prophet, whose ministry was despised.

### *Main themes of the book*

Chapter 1 describes Ezekiel’s astonishing visions of the glory of God. The prophet and people are in dire circumstances, virtually slaves in Babylon, but receive wonderful revelations. They are reminded that God’s providence is over all these events.

The book places an emphasis on holiness - both God’s holiness, and the holiness that He requires from each of His people. People had been mixing idolatry with the worship of God, worshipping however they wished. This has parallels with today’s society. Since the time of the French Revolution, the political establishment has seen the will of the people as the ultimate authority, thus doing away with God. The exile exemplifies the principle that when we abandon God’s ways, we end up in captivity of some kind.

At the time of writing, the exiles had been in Babylon for 25 years. Ezekiel had been in the first group to be carried away. For 14 of those years, the temple had been in ruins, and hopes lost. God sometimes speaks when our hope is low, and “our candle about to go out”.

### *A vision of a new temple*

In chapter 41 Ezekiel describes his vision of the temple being rebuilt. There are two strange aspects to this vision:

1. Things that are not mentioned. There is no mention of the High Priest, the Day of Atonement or the mercy seat. This is because it is a prophecy about the coming of Christ. He is our temple, our Great High Priest and our mercy seat.
2. The dimensions of the temple and the city of Jerusalem are extraordinarily large. The temple area covers more than a mile, and Jerusalem would cover virtually the whole area of Judah. These are pictures of the vast extension of the Kingdom of God at the coming of Christ.

## **Chapter 47 - a hopeful picture of God’s grace**

Ezekiel receives a tremendous revelation of the abounding grace of God, in the picture of a river. The stream runs southward all the way to the Dead Sea, and wherever the water flows, there is life. When grace comes, baseness disappears, and new life comes.

## **The spread of the Gospel brings blessing**

Some interpret the river as symbolising the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. Perhaps it is more accurate to see it as a picture of the benefits that the spread of Christianity has brought. Many people today are ignorant of these.

In the 1920s there was a famous debate between GK Chesterton, a Catholic, and Blatchford, an atheist. Chesterton pointed out that Christianity had tamed the barbarian nations of Europe and created modern Europe. He argued that “atheism has never built anything”. In the years to follow, atheism would underpin the Communist and Nazi regimes, so we can certainly say that atheism has built nothing *good*, in comparison with true Christianity which has done so much good. Even Richard Dawkins (the notorious atheist) now seems to acknowledge that the Christian religion has the power to hold society together, and without it we go downhill.

The River of Life replenishes the soul with joy and gladness, and the blessing diffuses so that everyone becomes an instrument or channel of grace. We should be diffusing blessing wherever we go!

## **Grace flows from the Saviour’s atoning death**

We can plot the course of Ezekiel’s river on a map of Israel. It goes through a desert area where the underlying rock is porous limestone. Any rain would go straight down through this rock, so could not possibly cause plants to grow. This rock is like the barren soul of man without that spark of grace that breathes life into the dead soul.

The Primitive Methodists sang that “Grace flowing like a river from the Saviour’s wounded side”. On the Cross, blood and water flowed when the Lord’s side was pierced - and now, grace flows to us from His atoning sacrifice.

## **We need this grace**

The book of Ezekiel is not the only place where the Bible speaks of the river of living water. Zechariah also prophesies about living waters flowing from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8). Revelation 22:1 describes the river of the water of life, with trees on either side whose leaves are for the healing of the nations - something we so long for today.

Globally, we are living in a very tense time as all the nations have departed from God. We need power from above - just as some countries rely on electricity generated from hydroelectric power high in the mountains. Without this power, we may have our schemes, but we are still in the dark. We need the power of prayer, the power of the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit.

No-one can live without the grace of God. Common grace stops humanity from destroying itself but more than that, we need saving grace from Christ. And this grace is abounding! The river gets deeper and deeper. Bunyan experienced “Grace abounding to the chief of sinners”, and Newton could write of “Amazing grace”. The river brings beauty and is on a purposeful journey - showing how true Christianity beautifies our character and gives us purposeful lives.

Finally, the river of grace flows to Heaven, where it is too deep to walk in and is ‘water in which one must swim’.

*O Christ, He is the fountain, the deep, sweet well of love;  
The streams on earth I've tasted, more deep I'll drink above.  
There, to an ocean fulness His mercy doth expand  
And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.*

'The sands of time are sinking' (Hymn 816).