

SAVED BY WATER

Ezekiel 47:1-9 The River From the Temple

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. 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.

John 3:1-5 Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

¹ Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” ³ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” ⁴ “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Message:

WATER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT COMPOUND IN THE WORLD. 70% OF THE EARTH'S SURFACE IS COVERED BY WATER. 65% OF THE HUMAN BODY IS WATER. WE ARE FORMED IN THE WATER OF OUR MOTHER'S WOMB, BORN IN A GUSH OF WATER, AND BORN AGAIN IN THE WATERS OF OUR BAPTISM.

JUST AS WATER HAS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE IN GOD'S CREATION IT ALSO HAS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION. WATER APPEARS THROUGHOUT THE SCRIPTURES AS A MEANS OF DELIVERANCE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE AND AS A MEANS OF DESTRUCTION FOR GOD'S ENEMIES. PETER WROTE: “... *THE EARTH WAS FORMED OUT*

OF WATER AND BY WATER...AND BY THESE SAME WATERS THE WORLD WAS DELUGED AND DESTROYED." WATER SAVES AND WATER DESTROYS.

AT THE BEGINNING OF GENESIS, THE EARTH IS DESCRIBED AS A BALL OF WATER. THEN GOD DIVIDED THE WATERS INTO THE CLOUDS ABOVE AND THE RIVERS, LAKES, OCEANS, SPRINGS AND AQUIFERS BELOW. WHEN GOD CREATED THE GARDEN OF EDEN HE CREATED A RIVER RUN TO THROUGH IT. IN *GENESIS 2:10* WE ARE TOLD, "A RIVER WATERING THE GARDEN FLOWED FROM EDEN AND SEPARATED INTO FOUR HEADWATERS."

LIFE CAME FROM WATER AND ALL LIVING THINGS DEPEND UPON WATER FOR THEIR EXISTENCE. BUT WHEN MANKIND REBELLED AND ALLOWED SIN TO FLOOD THE WORLD, THOSE SAME PRIMAЕVAL CLOUDS AND SPRINGS AND AQUIFERS UNLEASHED TUMULTUOUS VOLUMES OF WATER WHICH BROUGHT DEATH TO ALL LIVING THINGS. FOR FORTY DAYS AND NIGHTS THE WORLD WAS RETURNED TO A BALL OF WATER. NOAH AND HIS FAMILY HOWEVER WERE SAVED BY WATER AS THE ARK WHICH HE HAD BUILT THROUGH FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE LIFTED HIM ABOVE THE TORRENTS WHICH SWIRLED BELOW. YOU MIGHT SAY THAT NOAH WAS THE FIRST PERSON EVER SAVED BY FAITH. WATER BROUGHT DEATH AND WATER SAVED LIVES.

BABY MOSES, WHOSE NAME MEANS "DRAWN FROM WATER" WAS SAVED BY WATER WHEN HIS MOTHER PLACED HIM IN A FLOATING BASKET ON THE NILE TO PREVENT HIM BEING KILLED BY PHARAOH. AND WHEN MOSES GREW UP AND LED GOD'S PEOPLE OUT OF EGYPTIAN SLAVERY, GOD DELIVERED THEM FROM PHARAOH'S CLUTCHES BY PARTING THE WATER OF THE RED SEA TO LET THEM PASS THROUGH AND THEN CLOSED THE SAME WATER OVER THE HEADS OF PHARAOH'S ARMY. WATER BROUGHT LIFE; WATER BROUGHT DEATH.

AND SO WATER CAME TO SYMBOLIZE BOTH LIFE AND DEATH TO THE ISRAELITES. WHEN JOSHUA LED THE ISRAELITES ACROSS THE JORDAN RIVER INTO THE PROMISED LAND OF CANAAN, THEY THOUGHT OF IT AS CROSSING OVER FROM DEATH TO LIFE. WE STILL CARRY THAT THOUGHT IN THE HYMN, "*GUIDE ME O THOU GREAT JEHOVAH,*" WHOSE FINAL WORDS ARE: "*WHEN I TREAD THE VERGE OF JORDAN, BID MY ANXIOUS FEARS SUBSIDE; DEATH OF DEATH AND HELL'S DESTRUCTION, LAND ME SAFE ON CANAAN SIDE.*" THE RIVER JORDAN WAS THOUGHT OF AS A RIVER OF LIFE WHICH SEPARATED THOSE WHO LIVED "BEYOND THE RIVER"—THE PAGAN AMORITES AND EDMITES—FROM THE ISRAELITES, WHO LIVED IN THE PROMISED LAND. BUT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF ISRAEL, BEYOND THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES, LAY A FAR LARGER BODY OF WATER WHICH BOTH FASCINATED AND TERRIFIED THE ISREALITES. THIS WAS THE GREAT, DARK MEDITERRANEAN SEA, WHOSE GIGANTIC WAVES CLIMBED OUT OF FEARSOME DEPTHS TO BATTER THE SHORES OF ISRAEL. THE SEA REMINDED THE ISRAELITES OF THE PRIMORDIAL CHAOS THAT EXISTED BEFORE GOD FORMED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH. IT'S HUGE WAVES LEAPT UP LIKE MAN'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD AND IT WAS THOUGHT TO BE THE HOME OF LEVIATHAN OR SATAN WHOM GOD HAD CALLED, "*KING OVER ALL WHO WERE PROUD.*" AND SO THE ISRAELITES LIVED BETWEEN A RIVER OF LIFE ON THE EAST AND A SEA OF CHAOS AND DEATH ON THE WEST. WATER AS LIFE; WATER AS DEATH.

LATER, IN THE WRITINGS OF THE PROPHETS, WATER WAS ASSOCIATED WITH PURIFICATION AND NEW LIFE. "WASHINGS" OR "ABLUTIONS" OF WATER WERE USED AS RITUALS OF CLEANSING. LATER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ERA THESE CAME TO BE CALLED "BAPTISMS." ISAIAH WROTE, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, O JACOB MY SERVANT, FOR I WILL POUR WATER ON THE THIRSTY LAND, AND STREAMS ON THE DRY GROUND. I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT ON YOUR OFFSPRINGS AND MY BLESSING ON YOUR DESCENDENTS. THEY WILL SPRING UP LIKE GRASS IN A MEADOW, LIKE POPLAR TREES BY FLOWING STREAMS." THE PROPHET JOEL WROTE: "ON THE [DAY OF THE LORD] A FOUNTAIN WILL FLOW OUT OF THE LORD'S HOUSE—AND IT WILL WATER THE VALLEY OF ACACIAS." AND ZECHARIAH: "ON THAT DAY, LIVING WATER WILL FLOW OUT FROM JERUSALEM AND THE LORD WILL BE KING OVER THE WHOLE EARTH."

THROUGH THE PROPHET EZEKIEL THE LORD PROMISED: "I WILL SPRINKLE CLEAN WATER ON YOU AND YOU WILL BE CLEAN! I WILL CLEANSE YOU FROM ALL YOUR IMPURITIES AND FROM ALL YOUR IDOLS AND PUT A NEW SPIRIT IN YOU." EZEKIEL COMPARED THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD TO A RIVER WHICH FLOWS OUT FROM HIS THRONE AND CREATES NEW LIFE WHEREVER IT GOES. AND SO, THE PROPHETS WERE SAYING, JUST AS WATER HAD SERVED AS GOD'S MEANS OF DELIVERANCE FOR THE CHILDREN OF ANCIENT ISRAEL, IN THE FUTURE WATER WOULD SERVE AS A MEANS OF DELIVERANCE TO THE CHILDREN OF A NEW ISRAEL, TO WASH AWAY THEIR SINS AND ENDOW THEM WITH A NEW SPIRIT. SO FAR THE LAW, THE WRITINGS AND THE PROPHETS.

THEN, IN THE FULNESS OF TIME, GOD SENT HIS SON, THE MESSIAH, THE CHRIST, TO REVEAL HOW ALL THESE WATER PROPHECIES WOULD BE FULFILLED. THE FIRST HINT COMES IN JOHN 3:5, WHERE JESUS SAYS TO NICODEMUS: "I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, NO ONE CAN ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD UNLESS HE IS BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT." "BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT." THIS WAS THE "LIVING WATER" THAT JOEL AND ZECHARIAH AND EZEKIEL HAD SPOKEN OF HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE.

BUT WHERE ARE WE TO FIND THIS LIVING WATER? THAT IS THE QUESTION A SAMARITAN WOMAN AT A WELL IN SYCHAR ASKED JESUS: WHERE IS THIS LIVING WATER TO BE FOUND? JESUS ANSWERS: "WHOEVER DRINKS THE WATER I GIVE HIM WILL NEVER THIRST—I WILL BECOME IN HIM A SPRING OF WATER WELLING UP TO ETERNAL LIFE!" AND WHAT HE SAYS PRIVATELY TO THE WOMAN AT THE WELL, HE CRIES OUT TO THE CROWDS IN JERUSALEM ON THE LAST DAY OF THE FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES: "IF ANYONE IS THIRSTY LET HIM COME TO ME AND DRINK. WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME, AS THE SCRIPTURE HAS SAID, STREAMS OF LIVING WATER WILL FLOW FROM WITHIN HIM."

JESUS HIMSELF IS THE FOUNTAINHEAD OF LIVING WATER, THE SOURCE OF THE RIVER OF GOD'S SALVATION THAT FLOWS OUT OF THE PARADISE OF GOD. JESUS WHO FURNISHES THE SPRINKLING, THE WASHING AWAY OF IMPURITIES, AND THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO COMES TO DWELL IN THE HEART OF THE BELIEVER. JESUS ALONE IS THE SOURCE OF THE LIVING WATER OF ETERNAL LIFE.

AND THIS CLEANSING, THIS REBIRTH INTO ETERNAL LIFE AND THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ALL COME THROUGH THE MEANS OF GRACE WE CALL “BAPTISM”—WHERE WATER AND GOD’S PROMISE JOIN TOGETHER TO BRING THE CHILD OF GOD INTO GOD’S KINGDOM. *“YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT.”* AS PAUL WROTE TO TITUS: *“[GOD] SAVED US THROUGH THE WASHING OF REBIRTH AND RENEWAL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM HE Poured OUT ON US GENEROUSLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOR.”*

ONCE WHEN I AND MY FAMILY WERE VACATIONING IN ARKANSAS, MY DAUGHTER RACHEL AND I WENT CANOE-ING ON A RIVER CALLED THE “WHITE RIVER.” IT WAS SPRING-FED BUT WAS A FULL-SIZED RIVER—EIGHT TO TEN FEET DEEP AND OVER A HUNDRED FEET ACROSS. IT WAS CALLED THE WHITE RIVER BECAUSE ITS WATER WAS ABSOLUTELY CLEAR—YOU COULD SEE ITS BOTTOM AS CLEARLY AS YOU CAN SEE THROUGH A PANE OF GLASS. I CAN’T IMAGINE HOW MUCH PURE, CLEAN WATER THE WHITE RIVER DISCHARGES INTO THE MISSISSIPPI, YET IT IS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE RIVER OF GOD’S GRACE, WHOSE WATERS FLOW NOT FROM THE GROUND BUT FROM THE PARADISE OF GOD—FOR WHEREVER GOD IS, IS PARADISE.

THIS IS A RIVER, THE PSALMIST WRITES, *“...WHOSE STREAMS MAKE GLAD THE CITY OF GOD.”* A RIVER WHOSE EXPANSE IS SO WIDE THAT EZEKIEL DESCRIBES IT AS, *“...A RIVER THAT NO ONE CAN CROSS.”* A RIVER THAT SPRINGS FROM THE THRONE OF GOD AND FLOWS INTO THE SALTY SEA OF HUMAN DESPAIR AND DEATH AND TURNS IT INTO LIFE-GIVING WATERS.

IT IS FROM THIS VERY RIVER THAT DECKER BURKART WAS BAPTIZED TODAY. WHEN GOD’S PROMISE WAS ADDED TO THE WATERS OF THE BAPTISMAL FOUNT AND SPRINKLED OVER DECKER’S HEAD, HE WAS BORN AGAIN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT AND BECAME GOD’S OWN CHILD. THE SAME GOD WHO MADE THE EARTH AND THE MOON AND THE SUN AND THE STARS AND THE GALAXIES, THE SAME GOD WHO DIRECTS THE ORBITS OF ELECTRONS AROUND THE NUCLEI OF ATOMS IN THE RINGS OF SATURN—THAT SAME GOD CAME TO DECKER IN HIS HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH WATER AND WORD AND NOW LIVES IN HIM.

JUST AS GOD WAS THERE TO HEAR DECKER’S BORNING CRY, HE WAS HERE TODAY WHEN DECKER WAS BORN AGAIN AND HE WILL WATCH OVER HIM ALL HIS LIFE.

AMEN.