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THE LIFE-GIVING STREAM

—EZEKIEL 47:1-12.—SEPT. 10.—

Golden Text:—“Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely.”—Rev. 22:17.

EZEKIEL'S prophecy is full of symbolism, and has appropriately been termed the apocalypse of the Old Testament. It was written in Babylonia in the Chaldaic language.

Ezekiel was one of the captives of Judah taken to Babylonia by King Nebuchadnezzar on the occasion of his first invasion, when he placed Zedekiah on the throne, eleven years before his later invasion, when the city was destroyed. The captives taken at that time included many of the chief men of the Jewish nation, princes and nobles, the brightest and the best. His object in taking these seems to have been to

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strengthen his own empire, for the captives were not treated as slaves, but were granted great liberty, some of them, as in the case of Daniel, rising to positions of very high honor in the kingdom. Ezekiel had great liberty, and his prophesying was done for the Jews of the Babylonian captivity—exiles. The Lord's testimony through this prophet was undoubtedly intended to cheer and comfort those of his people who were Israelites indeed, and to fan the spark of faith which still remained in their hearts—to lead them, as in the case of Daniel, to hope for the return of God's favor and the end of their captivity with the end of the appointed seventy years' desolation of the land.

The matter of our lesson as heard by the Jews in exile undoubtedly was pictured as referring to earthly Jerusalem, and the blessings as appertaining to the Jews as a nation. The restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple are clearly and explicitly foretold, and no doubt the hearts of the captives leaped with joy as they thought of the future blessings, and no doubt also, their faith and hope were encouraged. But so surely as Ezekiel's prophecy was the Word of the Lord, so surely the prophecy did not relate to blessings to be conferred upon that people at the time of their restoration from the land of Babylon, for the predictions of Ezekiel's prophecy were never fulfilled.

Just so surely they belong to the future. Spiritual Israelites may realize that the prophecy not only related to natural Israel but also to spiritual Israel, not only to a deliverance from literal Babylon but also a deliverance from mystic Babylon, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots," whose power is soon to be completely overthrown as precedent to a full deliverance of all who are Israelites indeed and the establishment of the Kingdom.—Rev. 18.

THE RIVER OF LIFE

Our lesson deals particularly with one of Ezekiel's visions, which predicted the springing into existence of a wonderful river whose waters would bring to the

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land of Palestine and to the Dead Sea verdure and life instead of drouth, desolation and death. The ordinary interpretation of this lesson is that the Gospel is represented in this river, which now for a considerable time has been flowing onward and bringing life. We cannot accept this interpretation, for several reasons: First, the description is in such close agreement with the Millennial age blessings of Revelation 21 and 22 as to leave no doubt that the same thing is referred to. In Revelation we see that the Church is the Bride, and the Church glorified is symbolized by the heavenly Jerusalem and the river of the water of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations and whose fruit is for their sustenance and whose water is the water of life, living water. There can be no doubt that the two rivers are identical. And since the Church is not yet complete, and has therefore not yet been glorified, the river of life has not yet proceeded from the glorified Church, and hence the whole matter must be future.

The same thought is in this lesson as Ezekiel gives it. He first sees the Temple and then beholds the glory of the Lord entering the Temple through the eastern gate, and that gate closed after the Lord. This represents the closing of the door at the end of this age, as our Lord portrayed it in the parable of the ten virgins. The door will be shut, the glory of the Lord will have entered into the Temple. It is subsequent to this shutting of the door that the prophet is shown the issuing of the water from under the threshold. The lesson, therefore, is clear and explicit to the effect that not until the glory of the Lord shall have entered his Temple, not until the Church shall be glorified, not until that door shall be forever shut, will the water of life issue forth.

The stream is shown as rapidly increasing. Issuing as a rivulet it speedily becomes ankle deep, a little further along waist deep and a little further beyond a man's depth to ford. Thus is indicated the rapid increase of the blessings of the Lord as soon as his time shall have come; but, as we have heretofore pointed out, there is no such river of life now, our Master himself being authority for this in his statement respecting his disciples, saying, "The water I shall give him shall be in him

a well of water springing up to everlasting life.” Ours is not an invitation to drink of a river of life, but an invitation to have a wellspring of water of life started in our hearts by the impartation of the holy Spirit. As already pointed out it will be after the river of the water of life flows from the glorified Church that the Spirit and the Bride will say to the world of mankind, Come. Then whosoever will may come, whereas now no man can come “except the Father which sent me draw him.”

A REFRESHING PICTURE

Thus seen, God has rich blessings in store for mankind in general in the day when his Kingdom shall be established amongst men, in Immanuel’s day. The restitution of that time is pictured in the leaves of the trees; the abundance of instruction and nourishment, mental, moral and physical, is represented in the fruit of the trees. More than this, wherever the water of this river went life resulted, until finally it emptied itself into the Dead Sea with the effect that the waters of the latter were healed. Fishes thrive well in sea water, but the water of the Dead Sea is about five times as strongly pregnated with salts, and as a consequence fish taken from the Mediterranean and put into the Dead Sea die in a few minutes—hence its name, Dead Sea.

It would not at all surprise us if, in the beginning of the Millennial age, not only the nation of Israel would receive the blessing of the Lord lost at the beginning of this Gospel age and become his representative people in the world—the Church having been taken from the world, glorified spirit beings—but neither would it surprise us if, in the Lord’s providence, some miracle were wrought by which the Dead Sea would become connected with the Mediterranean, possibly refreshed also

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by some such river as is here described by Ezekiel, a picture of the symbolical river of life flowing from the New Jerusalem. But however interested we might be in the thought of such a literal fulfilment of this prophecy, our interest is still greater in the fulfilment of it as a symbol in accord with the river of Revelation. From this symbolical standpoint the Dead Sea represents the dead world, and the coming of life-giving waters would represent the resurrection power of the Lord and the Church exercised amongst men during the Millennial age. As the Apostle expresses it, it would mean, for the Gentiles, life from the dead.

But while it is refreshing and exhilarating to look down into the future and think of the blessings to come, it is important that we draw practical lessons and apply them to ourselves, and see to it that we do all in our power now to make our calling and our election sure, that we may be of that New Jerusalem class, the Bride glorified, from whom the river of the water of life will issue. There is no doubt that it will all be accomplished, because the Word of the Lord has spoken it. The whole

question for us is whether we or others will be the Lord's ministers, servants, honored agents in causing the blessing of the Lord to fill the whole earth. The more we love the glorious prospects set before us in the Word, the more we will strive for present participation in the sufferings of Christ, in laying down our lives for the brethren, and for future participation in the glories of Christ in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

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