

OT LESSON #44  
“EVERY THING SHALL LIVE WHITHER THE  
RIVER COMETH”

Ezekiel 43-44, 47  
by Ted L. Gibbons]

**INTRODUCTION:** Temples are popping up like dandelions in an untended lawn. We have the joy of living when only the most remote and economically deprived of people cannot make arrangements to visit a temple.

Nephi wrote that he and his people, after they had abandoned their wicked brethren and traveled into the wilderness, they “Lived after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27). One of the things they did to make such a life possible was to build a temple:

And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine (2 Nephi 5:16).

I believe Nephi knew what Joseph Smith knew and what Brigham Young knew and what President Hinckley knows: Temple experiences are one of the keys to true happiness. Ezekiel knew it too.

When I was in Brazil 35 years ago, we thought the organization of a single stake signaled the Second Coming. Now a fifth temple has been announced in what I have long considered the “only true country.” I know this not earth-shaking, but it is *hell-shaking*.

Some say, "I do not like to do this [build temples], for we never began to build a temple without the bells of hell beginning to ring." I want to hear them ring again. All the tribes of hell will be on the move, if we uncover the walls of this temple. But what do you think it will amount to? You have all the time seen what it

has amounted to.

I can say, for my comfort and consolation, and for yours, too, that we did build two temples, and commenced another. We completed a temple in Kirtland and in Nauvoo; and did not the bells of hell toll all the time we were building them? They did, every week and every day (Brigham Young, JD, vol. 8:p. 356).

President Packer wrote:

Temples are the very center of the spiritual strength of the Church. We should expect that the adversary will try to interfere with us as a church and with us individually as we seek to participate in this sacred and inspired work. Temple work brings so much resistance because it is the source of so much spiritual power to the Latter-day Saints and to the entire Church (“The Holy Temple,” Ensign, Feb. 1995, 36).

The truth is that people who have access to temples and temple experiences have a greater opportunity to be happy. In Ezekiel’s vision of the temple in Ezekiel 40-47, he describes certain qualities and attributes of the temple that can make us happy.

### **1. EZEKIEL IS SHOWN A VISION OF THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM.**

1. **[43:2,4,5] The glory of the Lord fills the temple.** Ezekiel speaks of a glory that shines (43:2), and spiritually sensitive people will see that glory radiating from the temple. The lights at night make these holy houses visible symbols of Mormon faith, but they also suggest the reality of what Ezekiel saw. These are houses of glory (see D&C 88:119). But a part of God’s glory is an effort to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man, and that glory—that work for the everlasting souls of men—also fills the temple.

2. **[43:7] The temple is the Lord’s throne on earth.** The throne is the place from which the King rules and dispenses blessings. On the earth, the place from which the Lord will do these things is his own house, the temple.

3. **[43:7] The temple is the place of the soles of his feet.** My mother spent

30 years serving in three different temples. She remembered when a member of the Quorum of the Twelve was asked if there were any accounts of the Savior visiting the Logan Temple. The reply, as she shared it with me was, "Of course he has visited this temple. It is his home. He often walks the halls and watches the work that is performed here." We would expect that his houses in our day would often experience the reality of his presence. The temple is a place for the soles of his feet. Next time you go to the temple, look at the carpets and think of this declaration from Ezekiel.

**4. [43:7] The temple is the place where the Lord dwells among the Children of Israel.** I have mentioned this before, I believe, but repetition is the mother of memory. My son sent me a picture from his mission that showed him on the hill overlooking Meg Ryan's House. How nice to work in an area where a movie star has a home. But I live and work in an area where God has a home.

Brigham Young said

Brethren, we are the Lord's, and all we possess; and I have determined, by the help of the Lord and this people, to build Him a house. You may ask, "Will He dwell in it?" He may do just as He pleases; it is not my prerogative to dictate to the Lord. But we will build Him a house, that if He pleases to pay us a visit, He may have a place to dwell in, or if He should send any of His servants, we may have suitable accommodations for them. I have built myself a house, and the most of you have done the same, and now shall we not build the Lord a house? (Journal of Discourses, Vol.1, p.376, Brigham Young, December 16, 1851).

**5. [43:11] The temple is a place for teaching and providing ordinances and laws in a specific and prescribed manner.**

And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

A written standard details the ordinances and forms and laws of the temple, and it specifies all the coming and goings associated therewith.

**6. [43:12] Even the grounds are most holy.**

Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy.

Many years ago I took my wife to the grounds of the Mesa Temple for a farewell. I was to leave the next morning for a couple of weeks of active duty associated with my assignment to an Army Reserve unit. It was late at night, long after the last patrons had departed. We had walked on the grass west of the temple for only a few moments when a security guard approached us with much kindness and asked us to stay on the paved pathways. His concern was to protect the grounds—the growing things—located in a holy place. All of you have marveled at the care given to the landscaping of the temples. Such work is done because we want these places to be attractive and because we the grounds are part of a house of the Lord, but also because “the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy.”

**7. [44:6-9] Only the worthy may enter.** Once a temple is dedicated, entrance and participation are limited to those who are able to meet certain rather rigorous requirements.

You must possess a current recommend to be admitted to the temple. This recommend must be signed by the proper officers of the Church. Only those who are worthy should go to the temple. Your local bishop or branch president has the responsibility of making inquiries into your personal worthiness. This interview is of great importance, for it is an occasion to explore with an ordained servant of the Lord the pattern of your life. If anything is amiss in your life, the bishop will be able to help you resolve it. Through this procedure, as you counsel with the common judge in Israel, you can declare or can be helped to establish your worthiness to enter the temple with the Lord’s approval (Boyd K. Packer, “The Holy Temple,” Ensign, Feb. 1995, p. 32).

## **8. [44:17, 18] Workers wear special clothing.**

And it shall come to pass, that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, whiles they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. . . .

## **9. [44:23] The Priesthood teaches the difference between the holy and the profane**

And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

The Lord has charged modern priesthood leaders not to “suffer [allow] any unclean thing to come into” his houses. This is a serious responsibility. Relatives of mine presided over a temple that had, in the beginning of their service, a parking lot covered with blacktop. When the weather was extremely hot, those crossing the lot to enter the temple occasionally tracked tar into the building itself, discoloring the carpets and floors. One of the responsibilities of Bishops and Stake Presidents and others is to teach members that no one tracks “spiritual tar” into the temple.

## **2. EZEKIEL SEES A RIVER FLOWING FROM THE TEMPLE THAT GIVES LIFE TO THE DESERT AND HEALS THE DEAD SEA.**

Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar (Ezek. 47:1).

This river is real, a waterway that will one day come from under the temple and flow to the Dead Sea.

Judah must return, Jerusalem must be rebuilt, and the temple, and water come out from under the temple, and the waters of the Dead Sea be healed. It will take some time to rebuild the walls of the city and the temple, Etc.; and all this must be done

before the Son of Man will make his appearance (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.286)

But this river is also an image rich in symbolism. If we visualize the river as a symbol for the blessings of the temple, we can absorb some wonderful lessons taught by Ezekiel. Notice what Ezekiel 37 tells us about this river and its effects.

1. “Behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other” (47:7). The Judean Wilderness is a desert, a barren desolate landscape where any tree is an abnormality. But this river will be lined with trees. It will heal any desert through which it passes.
2. “These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed . . . and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed . . .(47:8,9)

The Dead Sea is the saltiest, most mineral-laden water in the world, located at the lowest point on the planet at 400 meters below sea level. What kind of miracle will be required to heal these waters which are currently so salty that they do not allow fish and other marine life?

3. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live . . . and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.

Everything that the river touches will live. Ponder that. What are the life-giving effects of temple participation?

4. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine (Ezek. 47:12).

The river will provide a growing environment for fruit trees with different

kinds of fruit, and the leaves of these trees will have medicinal qualities.

John the Revelator had a vision of this river and the throne of God [see Ezek. 43:7] from whence it issues.

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:1,2).

These passages are profuse with meaning and promises for those who embrace the work and the power of temples.

### **3. EZEKIEL MEASURES THE RIVER'S DEPTH.**

Ezekiel, in his vision, crossed this river three times and tried to cross a fourth. He reports his experience in these provocative words:

At the first crossing, a thousand cubits from the temple, “the waters were to the ankles.”

At the second crossing, a thousand cubits further downstream, “the waters were to the knees”

At the third crossing, another thousand cubits away, “the waters were to the loins” (Ezek. 47:3-4).

After another thousand cubits, “It was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over (Ezek. 47:5).

What do the numbers in this passage suggest to you? What ought we to learn from the increasing depth of the river? What might finally happen after years of temple attendance that might be compared to “a river that could not be passed over”? What does the learning curve from your temple visits look like? Do you learn more or less now than you did when you first attended? Certainly you have gone to the temple and discovered things that were not

clear to you. What does Ezekiel's account here suggest we ought to do? We ought to wade into the river of temple instruction over and over again.

This is the kind of instruction that the Lord promises in the temples:

I, the Lord, require at their hands, that there may be a house built unto me for the salvation of Zion-- For a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and for a place of instruction for all those who are called to the work of the ministry in all their several callings and offices; That they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine, in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth . . . (D&C 97:12-14).

**CONCLUSION:** We have a part in all of this. Along with the blessings that flow to us from the temple, like a river to the Dead Sea, we have obligations to those who have gone before us. What a work we have to do! And what a blessing of joy and happiness it is to do it.

To accomplish this work there will have to be not only one temple but thousands of them, and thousands and tens of thousands of men and women will go into those temples and officiate for people who have lived as far back as the Lord shall reveal (Discourses of Brigham Young, p.394).

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