

THE RIVER OF SALVATION.

AUG. 20. – EZEK. 47:1-12.

"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." – Rev. 22:17.

MANY OF the particulars connected with this vision described by Ezekiel are so circumstantial to the land of Israel as to give considerable ground for belief that it will have a literal fulfilment in the future; and in connection with the vision is shown a new division of the land of Canaan amongst the twelve tribes. But whatever literal fulfilment the vision may have, we may be positive that it is to have a grand fulfilment as a symbol, for the life-giving river here brought to our attention is undoubtedly the same one described six hundred years later, by John the Revelator, and referred to in our Golden Text.

Referring to the description of the river starting from the Temple, Prof. Davidson says, "The natural fact upon which this conception rests is this, that there was a fountain connected with the Temple hill, the waters of which fell into the valley east of the city, and made their way toward the sea." So far as we may know, this fountain never was of any considerable size, and never would be, without more or less of a miracle, for at present the entire country is arid, except in the rainy season. From this fountain the Valley of Kedron leads directly to the Dead Sea, which, as is well known, has no connection with the ocean waters, either on the surface or subterraneously, and is 1308 feet below the sea level.

However, there are evidences that at one time the Dead Sea was on a level with the ocean, and if by earthquake or otherwise the connection between it and the ocean waters were re-established it would rise to its old level, which would make of it an inland sea 150 miles long, and five to ten miles wide. And such a filling up of its basin would have a marked effect, not only upon the humidity of the atmosphere in its vicinity, but also upon the water-springs of lower

Palestine. The natural result would be, not only that the Dead Sea would be sweetened of its brackishness, and become like the ocean, but also that the springs in the vicinity of Jerusalem would be greatly enlarged so as to produce some such river as this described in the prophecy, and these springs in that now parched desert country would cause its vegetation to prosper. It is worthy of note that this valley now occupied by the Dead Sea was once most fertile, – before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. We read, "Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, – even as the garden of the Lord." (Gen. 13:10.) And the restitution of this country to a Paradisiac condition is what the Prophet Ezekiel describes, if his language be given a literal interpretation at all – and this it seems to demand, as well as the symbolic interpretation.

There are many who seek to apply this prophetic vision as a symbol to the present time, and claim that this river of salvation has been flowing through the world from the days of Ezekiel until now; – especially during this Gospel age. These interpreters claim that the depth of the water up to the ankles would represent a date when Christians numbered fifty millions; the depth of the water up to the knees a period when Christians numbered a hundred millions; a depth of water up to the loins a date when Christians numbered two hundred millions; and a river that could not be waded, representing the present time, when the population of Christendom is estimated at four hundred and fifteen millions. But can we agree with this interpretation? Is it reasonable, is it Scriptural?

(1) We answer, No; it is not a reasonable interpretation, for, if we may judge of the Christians so-called in the past by those so-called in the present, we must conclude that the river is far from pure, "clear as crystal:" indeed, all will agree that if nine-tenths of those who name the name of Christ, but who deny him in their daily lives, were to withdraw from all profession, the Christian Church would be greatly blessed by their withdrawal and the influence of the Church and the

light from it would be increased many-fold. Bishop Foster, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, sized up the situation well when comparing the professed church to a sheep-fold, he pronounced the vast majority "black, ring-streaked and speckled." We all are confident that only a comparatively little flock are of the class mentioned by the Lord as being reckonedly washed whiter than snow, through his grace and truth.

(2) It is not a Scriptural view. The Scriptures declare that God's grace at the present time is not comparable to a river, but in our Lord's words, "It shall be *in him* [each believer] a well of water springing up [R2508 : page 196] into everlasting life." (John 4:14.) And those Christians in whom God's grace is a fountain of life and refreshment are comparatively few. They are those who have been "begotten of the spirit of truth" through the Word of truth. They are the "sanctified in Christ Jesus;" they are the "little flock," to the faithful of whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom.

No Scripture anywhere suggests that the water of eternal life is now *free*; nor that all are now called to drink of it. Our Lord Jesus himself declared the contrary of this, saying, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44.) The drawing or calling of God through a knowledge of his grace is only unto those who have ears to hear, amongst those to whom the call is addressed; and the call has been specially sent to and has specially reached [R2508 : page 197] only comparatively few of the earth's fifteen hundred millions, – chiefly the inhabitants of Europe and America. And of this comparatively small number to whom the Word of the Lord has been sent, and of the still smaller number who have had "ears to hear" that call, only a still smaller number are chosen, as we read, "Many are called, but few chosen." (Matt. 20:16.) Not many are called, in proportion to the whole, but many are called in proportion to the number chosen, the few, the elect.

Returning to the Prophet's vision, we note that the waters flowed out from the house of the Lord, from the Temple, and that wherever they went they brought vitality and refreshment, healing, restitution life – even to the Dead Sea. This to our understanding is a picture of the grace of God during the Millennial age, when from the Church, the house of God, the Temple, "the habitation of God through the spirit" (Eph. 2:22), the stream of the water of life, healing, restoring, rejuvenating, shall flow to all the families of the earth, whose condition is represented by the wilderness eastward of Jerusalem. The result will be the blessing and restitution of all the living families of the earth willing to receive the blessing. And it means more: for the Dead Sea fitly represents the vast multitude of mankind which has gone into the tomb, and the water of life shall reach even these, and bring to them also awakening from death, opportunities of restitution.

That the fulfilment of this vision could not be a thing of the past nor of the present is evident when we remember that the house of God, the Temple, the Church, is not yet completed – that the present is the time in which the Lord is fitting the "living stones" for the Temple, – is chiseling, fitting and polishing each for the place to which he is called. The present Gospel age was typified in the building of Solomon's Temple, by the period of preparation of the materials, after which we are informed that the whole house came together quickly, each stone fitting to its place and each timber to its position, and that without the sound of a hammer or any tool of iron. So with the "living stones," as the Apostle Peter calls the Church. (1 Pet. 2:5.) These are "builded together for a habitation of God through the spirit," and the building will not be completed until the last of these fitted and polished stones is laid in its position. Then the glory of the Lord shall fill the house, – the Church will be glorified. Then will have come the time represented in this vision, when the stream of the water of life, truth and grace shall flow from the glorified Temple.

As there is no completed Temple yet, so there is no river yet; but when the Temple is completed, when the various members of the body

of Christ are brought together and united in glory, honor and immortality to the Head of the Church, then from this united and glorified company of God's elect shall flow the symbolic river of water of life, clear as crystal. In each member of this Temple class, in each of these "living stones," already is a well-spring of truth and grace, and when these many well-springs shall have thus been united to the great Head and Fountain, the result naturally will be a stream of good proportions, – a river. To this coming time of blessing of the world our Lord refers, saying, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38.) In order to be of this class in whom the great river of water of life will take its start, it is necessary, first, that the believer shall now come unto Jesus and drink of him, the great Fountain of life; and it will be as a result of this partaking of the great Fountain that all of the elect Church shall become minor well-springs and fountains in due time.

Turning to the description of this same symbolic river, furnished us in the Book of Revelation (chapter 22), we find abundant evidences that it does not refer to the present time, but to the Millennial age. For instance, it is symbolically pictured as having trees of life on either side, whose leaves are for the healing of the *nations* – not for the healing of the *Church*, which at this time is the glorified Temple from which this river proceeds – and this healing of the nations signifies, as plainly as a symbolic picture could indicate it, *restitution*, – the healing of the woes of the groaning creation, its sin and sickness and imperfection.

We notice also that the proclamation which will then be made will not be restricted, as at the present time, to "even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39.) It will not be to an "elect" class; it will no longer be said, "No man can come unto me, except the Father draw him." The call at that time will be general – to every creature – "*Whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely." We notice further that that broad invitation is extended by God through the holy spirit and the glorified Church, as it is written, "The spirit and the bride

say, Come!" We notice further that this expression, "the bride," unquestionably places this call in the future, because, altho the elect Church of this Gospel age is called out from the world to become the bride of Christ, she does not become such, does not enter that exalted station, until in the end of the age she is perfected in glory and in the likeness of her Lord. Then will come "the marriage of the Lamb:" and not until after the marriage will there be a bride; and not until after the bride has thus been accepted as such can "the spirit *and the bride* say, Come!" to the nations – the Gentiles.

This same glorious City (Kingdom), the glorified New Jerusalem, the Church, and the river of the water [R2508 : page 198] of life gushing forth therefrom, are brought to our attention in Psalm 46: "There is a river, the rivulets of which shall spring from the City of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved. God shall help her early in the morning." The connections here also show that these rivulets are not to be expected to flow out as a river, until the Millennial morning, and the context refers particularly to the time of trouble with which the present age shall end and the Millennial morning shall be introduced.

Those whom the Lord our God has called, and who, in obedience to that call, have come to Jesus, the Fountain of life, and through him have tasted that the Lord is gracious, should let the Word and grace of God dwell in them richly and abound, making them neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord and in his service. It is for these to seek enlargement in the grace of God, that as well-springs they may be deeper and wider and more and more filled to overflowing with that grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. It is for these to see to it, each for himself, that he has not received the grace of God in vain, and that this well-spring does not become choked with the rubbish of this present evil world, its aims, its hopes, its ambitions, its pride, its desires of the flesh; – that thus, under divine providence and supervision, we may be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and have fellowship with our glorious Lord and Head in the

sending forth of the river of salvation unto the ends of the earth in "due time;" – the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, to whosoever will of all the families of the earth. – 2 Pet. 1:4-11; 2 Cor. 6:1; Col. 1:12; 1 John 1:3.
