

Gospel Doctrine #44 “Every Thing Shall Live Whither the River Cometh” (Ezekiel 43–44; Ezekiel 47)

Lesson Goal: To encourage us to partake of the life-giving, healing powers that are available in the temple.

Bible Dictionary: “A temple is literally a house of the Lord, a holy sanctuary in which sacred ceremonies and ordinances of the gospel are performed by and for the living and also in behalf of the dead. A place where the Lord may come, it is the most holy of any place of worship on the earth” (*Bible Dictionary*, 781).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “The inspired erection and proper use of temples is one of the **great evidences of the divinity** of the Lord’s work. **Without revelation they can neither be built nor used.** Where there are temples, with the spirit of revelation resting upon those who administer therein, there the Lord’s people will be found; where these are not, the Church and kingdom and the truth of heaven are not” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 781).

Boyd K. Packer: **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).

Ezekiel divides into three parts: (1) prophecies against Israel in Ezekiel’s day (Ch. 1-24), (2) prophecies against Israel’s enemies in Ezekiel’s day (Ch. 25-32), and (3) prophecies of hope concerning Israel’s future (Ch. 33-48).

1. Ezekiel is shown a vision of the temple in Jerusalem.

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 qualities and attributes of the temple that can make us happy.

1. The glory of the Lord fills the temple.

Ezek. 43:2, 4-5: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. . . . And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect *is* toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.

Ezekiel speaks of a glory that shines and spiritually sensitive people will see that glory radiating from the temple. These are houses of glory. 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. The temple is the Lord’s throne on earth and the place of the soles of his feet. The temple is the place where the Lord dwells among the Children of Israel.

Ezek. 43:7: And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile.

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. He often walks the halls and watches the work that is performed there. The temple is a place for the soles of his feet.

3. The temple is a place for teaching and providing ordinances and laws in a specific and prescribed manner.

Ezek. 43:11: 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.

4. Even the grounds are most holy.

Ezek. 43:12: This *is* the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain **the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy.** Behold, this *is* the law of the house.

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 the grounds are part of a house of the Lord, but also because “the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy.”

5. Only the worthy may enter.

Ezek. 43:9: Now let them **put away their whoredom**, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and **I will dwell in the midst of them for ever.**

Once a temple is dedicated, entrance and participation are limited to those who are able to meet certain rather rigorous requirements.

Boyd K. Packer: You must possess a current recommend to be admitted to the temple. 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 you can declare or can be helped to **establish your worthiness** to enter the temple with the Lord's approval
(*"The Holy Temple," Ensign, Feb. 1995, 32.*)

Psalms 24:3-4: Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? **He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.**

6. Workers wear special clothing.

Ezek. 44:17-18: 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. . . **They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads,** and shall have linen breeches upon their loins .

7. The Priesthood teaches the difference between the holy and the profane

Ezek. 44:23: 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. One temple president presided over a temple that had 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.

Ezek. 47:1-2: 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. Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, **behold, there ran out waters on the right side.**

Living water is essential for our spiritual survival during our battles with Satan.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "Living water is **"the words of eternal life, the message of salvation, the truths about God and his kingdom; it is the doctrines of the gospel"** (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, 3 vols. [1966-73], 1:151.*)

John 4:14: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Ways we can open a conduit to the Lord so that living water can flow in our lives:

- **Go to the temple,** the house of the Lord, where we may **be endowed with power and understanding, be instructed by the Lord, and feel peace and joy.**
- **Partake of the truth, wisdom, revelation, and covenants** that flow from the temple and **give spiritual life and healing.**

Ezekiel 47:12 "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."

Psalms 1:1-3 "Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But **his delight is in the law of the Lord;** and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be **like a tree planted** by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and **whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."**

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:

Ezek. 47: 3: At the first crossing, a thousand cubits (1/3 of a mile) from the temple, "the waters were to the ankles."

Ezek. 47: 4: At the second crossing, a thousand cubits further downstream, "the waters were to the knees."

Ezek. 47: 4: At the third crossing, another thousand cubits away, "the waters were to the loins."

Ezek. 47: 5: 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."

We learn from the increasing depth of the river to ask ourselves the following:

- 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.

S. Michael Wilcox: "In his vision, Ezekiel is instructed to wade into the river and measure its depth. The first time he enters it, 'the waters were to the ankles.' Now, an ankle-deep river is nothing to get excited about, but Ezekiel is instructed to walk down the bank a little farther and wade in again. This time 'the waters were to the knees.' He is told to continue down the bank and measure the depth again. 'The waters were to the loins.'"

"Ezekiel's last description of the river's depth contains a beautifully symbolic truth of what the temple can become for all of us if we wade into its waters again and again. '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.' (Ezekiel 47:3-5.) **The water is now over his head, and he can immerse himself in its cool freshness.**

"**The first time we enter a temple, we barely get our feet wet.** We are barely introduced to the Lord's light and love. What a tragedy it is when members of the Church judge the temple to be shallow or not deeply refreshing based on that first experience. Yet all of us know that on a hot summer day, wading even ankle deep in a cool stream brings instant refreshment and a hesitancy to leave the flowing water to return to our shoes. In light of this, it is not difficult to feel Moses' sense of wonder when he was told to 'put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' (Exodus 3:5.) **Elder Widtsoe** cautioned that it is not fair 'to pass opinion on temple worship after one day's participation followed by an absence of many years. **The work should be repeated several times in quick succession, so that the lessons of the temple may be fastened upon the mind.**' ("Temple Worship," p. 64.) **Little do the casual waders know that down the river, if they will patiently persist, are life-giving, healing 'waters to swim in.'** For the water rises each time we wade. Little do they realize **the power of those waters to heal** the disharmony of our lives, our families, and eventually the world.

"If we understand little or feel little the first time we enter the temple, at all cost let us not abandon the river. We must continue down the bank and wade in again and again. If we do that, we will feel the waters rise until they are over our heads, and we can plunge deeply into the refreshing, life-giving, healing waters of God's love and light. **As we continue to wade in again and again, our understanding of the Lord's great plan of mercy and happiness as taught through the temple symbols will rise also.** If you feel you are understanding the temple ceremonies at an ankle-deep level, **do not despair. Wade in again and again and again.** In time you will feel the water rise and your understanding deepen. When talking with children about the temple, I often tell them about Ezekiel's river. Their eyes are full of wonder, delight and anticipation at the thought that one day they too will be able to swim in Heavenly Father's river. We, who are older, can learn a great deal from their eagerness" (*House of Glory: Finding Personal Meaning in the Temple* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1995], 41 - 43).

Ezekiel suggests we ought to wade into the river of temple instruction over and over again.

Ezekiel 47:6-9 "And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen *this*? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river *were very many trees* on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, **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 it shall come to pass, *that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live:* and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because **these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.**"

S. Michael Wilcox: "The water in Ezekiel's vision of the temple forms a river that flows down eastward into the Judean wilderness. Ezekiel returns to the bank of the river and finds 'very many trees on the one side and on the other' (Ezek. 47:7). The water goes into the Judean wilderness and then empties into the Dead Sea. Everywhere the water flows in the Judean wilderness, it cuts a swath of green through the desert. **Everywhere water flows, life springs up.**

"When I read those words, Ezek. 47:6-9, the Spirit whispers this thought: 'That which will one day be temporally true of my house in Jerusalem, is spiritually true now of all my temples.' Out from the east doors of the Jordan River Temple, where I go most frequently, is a **river of water**. It is not a river you see with the eyes, but it is there nonetheless. It will do two things: **give life and heal everything it touches**--our families, our friendships, our bruised and broken hearts battered by the trials of life. Nephi tells us that **the fountain of living water is the love of God** (1 Ne. 11:25). The river that flows from the temple is a **river of light, truth, and power**, but primarily it is a **river of love; it will heal and give life to everything**" (S. Michael Wilcox, *Every Good Thing: Talks from the 1997 BYU Women's Conference*, ed. by Dawn Anderson, Dora Dalton, and Susette Green, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1998], 296 - 297).

4. "The Great Symbol of [Our] Membership"

President Howard W. Hunter: "I invite the Latter-day Saints to look to the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of your membership. It is the deepest desire of my heart to have every member of the Church worthy to enter the temple. **It would please the Lord if every adult member would be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend. The things that we must do and not do to be worthy of a temple recommend are the very things that ensure we will be happy as individuals and as families**" (Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 8).

President Howard W. Hunter: "All of our efforts in proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead lead to the holy temple. **This is because the temple ordinances are absolutely crucial;** we cannot return to God's presence without them. I encourage everyone to worthily attend the temple or to work toward the day when you can enter that holy house to receive your ordinances and covenants. As the prophets have said, **the temple is a place of beauty; it is a place of revelation; it is a place of peace.** It is the house of the Lord. It is holy unto the Lord. **It must be holy and important to us**" ("A Temple-Motivated People," *Ensign*, Feb. 1995, 5).

President Boyd K. Packer: "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).

President David O. McKay's story about Temple Preparation: "In our day, instances of lack of preparation have been cited by our prophets. When the Los Angeles Temple building program was commenced, President McKay called a meeting of the stake presidents of the Temple district. During this meeting, President McKay took occasion to express his feelings about the holy endowment. He indicated how some years before, a niece of his had received her ordinances in the house of the Lord. He had learned that she only recently before that had received an initiation into a sorority at the local university. She had had the crassness to say that she found the sorority initiation superior in effect and meaning to her than the endowment. President McKay was open and frank with them about the experience of one in his own family with the endowment. He wasn't worried about their audible gasps. With characteristic aplomb, he paused, and then said, "Brothers and sisters, she was disappointed in the Temple. Brothers and sisters, **I was disappointed in the Temple.** And so were you." Then he said something incredibly important that should be engraven on all our souls. **"There are few, even Temple workers, who comprehend the full meaning and power of the Temple endowment.** Seen for what it is, **it is the step-by-step ascent into the Eternal Presence.**" Then he added, **"If our young people could but glimpse it, it would be the most powerful spiritual motivation of their lives!"** (The story is told by Truman Madsen in *The Radiant Life* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994: Chapter 10).

President McKay elsewhere recounted similar feelings: "Do you remember when you first went through the House of the Lord? I do. And I went out disappointed. Just a young man, out of college, anticipating great things when I went to the Temple. I was disappointed and grieved, and I have met hundreds of young men and young women since who had that experience. I have now found out why. There are two things in every Temple: mechanics, to set forth certain ideals, and symbolism, what those mechanics symbolize. **I saw only the mechanics when I first went through the Temple. I did not see the spiritual.** I did not see the symbolism of spirituality... I was blind to the great lesson of purity behind the mechanics. I did not hear the message of the Lord...How many of us young men saw that? We thought we were big enough and with intelligence sufficient to criticize the mechanics of it and we were blind to the symbolism, the message of the spirit. And then that great ordinance, the endowment. **The whole thing is simple in the mechanical part of it, but sublime and eternal in its significance**" (Gregory Prince and Wm. Robert Wright. *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005): 277).

NOTES ON LESSON 44

Early in Ezek.8:3,6,16—Temple desecrated
Balanced by Ezek. 40-48—Temple restored and sanctified

598 BC—Babylonians invaded Jerusalem
Ezekiel exiled to Babylonia to protect them from wickedness
Hope for Jews to return. Warned them

593 BC—Impending doom of Jerusalem
Destruction sure—to destroy idols; know Jehovah is God

592 BC—Corruption of the temple. Jews said Jehovah absent, so
turned to idols.
Lord forced to destroy them for their own good.

588 BC—Ezekiel has visions and revelations

588 BC—Babylonian siege of Jerusalem

587 BC—Jerusalem destroyed

573 BC—Lord gave Ezekiel a vision of the future and restored
Temple.
Ezekiel saw temple on Mt. Moriah—angelic ministrant
guided him through the temple, measuring everything

Ezekiel 43: Saw the glory of God return to the temple
Altar
Exactness in worshipping

Ezekiel 44: Regulations of the temple

Ezekiel 47: Living waters and renewing the land

The Lord reprimanded Israel and promised them hope upon
repentance. He had a plan for their recovery.