

The River

November 13

The River is presented in the Bible as a physical location and literary symbol both simultaneously describing God communing with his people in perfect holiness.

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery edited by Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman report 150 biblical references to the river as a source of life, a boundary of cleansing, the meeting of divine-human encounter, and God's provision.

Genesis 2:10

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy contain God's promise to Israel of a land flowing with milk and honey. In Job 20:17 we discover that this is river imagery.

Psalm 1

3He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers... 6for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Jeremiah 17

5Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. 6 He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

God's covenant with us his people includes curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience.

The river becomes a symbol for God's blessing as well as one of the actual blessings for obedience. The lack of water becomes a symbol for God's curse as well as one of the actual punishments for disobedience.

Psalm 36

7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. 8 They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. 9 For with you is the fountain of life...

God is the source of the river, that is the source of life and delight.

Psalm 46:4

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

The symbolic and actual location of the river speaks of God communing with his people in holiness.

Isaiah 32

1 Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. 2 Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry place...

Isaiah prophesies the holy reign of Jesus, the Messiah, along with his just rulers.

The holy and just reign brings God's blessing to the location and community cursed by God.

Isaiah 35

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert... the grass shall become reeds and rushes... 8 And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. 9 No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it... but the redeemed shall walk there. 10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The river imagery is used to describe the transformational results of the Messiah!

The Gospel of Isaiah =

"even if they are fools, they shall not go astray" and "the ransomed of the Lord shall return..!"

Isaiah 44

3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. 4 They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams.

Isaiah connects the river imagery to the Spirit poured out upon Abraham's offspring.

The offspring of Abraham are those who have the same faith as Abraham possessed.

The water poured out becoming a river in the desert is likened to the Holy Spirit poured out upon sinners.

Ezekiel 47

1 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. 2 Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. 3 Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. 4 Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. 5 Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. 6 And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. 7 As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 And he said to me, "This water flows... and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. 9 And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes... 12 And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."

What are we to make of this vision given to Ezekiel?

In light of Isaiah's connecting the river to the Holy Spirit and in light of what Jesus would say about the river and the Holy Spirit we conclude:

1. The Holy Spirit is poured out upon us from the Father and the Son in heaven.
2. The Holy Spirit gives life to us.
3. The number of those who receive eternal life is a great number.
4. The work of the Holy Spirit results in spiritual fruit and healing.

John 7

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit...

The river is a symbol of God communing with his people in perfect holiness.

Anyone who is in need of this new life must come to Jesus.

Revelation 22: 1-2

1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The Gospel of the River:

God is the source of eternal life.

God is the source of reconciliation and peace for the nations.