

## River of God: Water of Life (1)

10:00 a.m. Monday Morning Class 15.02.10  
Bible College SA Rev. Dr. Noel Due

1. The idea of sacred rivers, holy water(s), cleansing water etc. has a long history
  - Some examples?
  - What are the fields of meaning associated with the 'waters' e.g. cleansing, healing, source of knowledge
2. The Old Testament is written against the background of the ANE, and is to be understood as much as by its contrast as by its similarity
  - hence the 'polemical' elements of the creation accounts (for example, the role of the serpent; the 'sun and the moon' which God set in place; etc.)
  - the contrast between the worship of Israel and that of the nations (more later)
  - the similarity of Israel's own national and social life, and the dissimilarity of the response of Yahweh when compared to other 'gods'
  - so also the similarities and differences in the theme of the River of God and related concepts.
3. The theme flows through the Scriptures from beginning to end. For example:
  - The creation accounts indicate that the Eden was a place for headwaters to flow from (Gen. 2:10ff.).
    - The garden is a mountain-city-garden, and king's palace garden...well watered, but also a source of water.
  - God provides water in the wilderness as salvation for his people (e.g. Ex. 17; Numb. 20:1-13 cf. Ps. 78:15-16; 105:41; 107:35; Is. 48:21), and God's redemptive work is said to make his people like a well watered garden (Is. 27:2-3; 58:11; Jer 31:10-14)
    - He rescues his people from Egypt, and strikes the heart of that nation's dependency on the Nile and the gods associated with it.
    - He rescues them by bringing them through the waters of the Red Sea.
  - Ps. 46:4, which in its context contrasts the river/stream of God with the roaring tumult of the 'waters' (nations? E.g. Is. 17:12-13; Jer. 46:7-8) that threaten destruction (cf. Ps. 69:1, 2, 14; 93:3-4)
    - It is also significant that there is no physical river in Jerusalem, in contrast to the other cities of the ANE (e.g. in Egypt, Babylon, Assyria etc.).
    - God himself is the 'river' for his people, as is also made plain in Jer. 2:13; 17:13; etc.
  - Ps. 36:8-9 speaks of the river of delight and the fountain of living water, and this in the context of the sheltering righteousness of God.
  - Ps. 23:2 indicates that the Lord, the Shepherd, leads us by still waters to restore our soul. The whole Psalm extols the Lord's tender care for his flock, and magnifies his full provision for their rest.
  - Namaan is healed in the waters of the Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-14 and this provides a contrast with the normal rituals associated with the sacred waters of Assyria).
  - Many Old Testament prophecies of the new covenant, or other gracious visitations of God are couched in terms of living water, cleansing water, streams in the desert or refreshing showers (e.g. Ezk. 36:22ff.; 34:26; Is. 35:6-7; 41:17-

18; 43:18-21; 44:3; 49:10; 52:12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8). Thus there are springs of salvation that lead to great rejoicing (e.g. Is. 12:1-3)

- Ezk. 47:1-12 tells of a river which flows from the throne of the new (spiritual) Temple, and that this river continues to broaden and deepen as it goes, bringing life to all it touches.
- Jesus says much about the living water that God provides through him (e.g. John 4; 7:37ff.); and as the Lamb he leads them to springs of living water (Rev. 7:17; 21:6)
- The Revelation is full of rich imagery, both of the evil, destructive 'sea' of the nations under the power of the Dragon (as in Rev. 13:1 cf. 17:15; 12:15a) and the full flowing streams of God's healing love (as in Rev. 22).

The river of God, the water of life,  
Flows from the Temple above,  
From under the throne, where mercy is found,  
Bringing Life wherever it runs.

The Spirit of God, the river of life,  
Stems out from the holiest place,  
From altar of judgement it flows to the world,  
To flood us with Father's great grace.

The unending steam of mercy and love,  
Flows out from the Father's own heart,  
It pours from his side in torrents so wide,  
Through body and blood of the Son.

The river eternal flows still to the world,  
And deepens and spreads as it goes,  
It cleanses and heals, and makes fruitful fields,  
From deserts and wastes of our lives.

O River of God, O Spirit of Love,  
In torrents please come to your Church,  
Baptise us afresh in love of the Three,  
That nations may know Christ is Lord.

11.02.10