

River of God: Water of Life (2)

10:00 a.m. Monday Morning Class 22.02.10
Bible College SA Rev. Dr. Noel Due

1. Last week, we saw in passing that many Old Testament promises of a time of cleansing, forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit were expressed in terms of refreshing showers, cleansing streams, sprinkling with water, and like images. Here are some examples:

- Ezk. 34:26. Note this in the context of Israel's history at this point.
 - Ezekiel lived during the time of the exile. He saw in a vision the glory of the Lord preparing to depart from the Temple (Ezk. 10 and 11:22-25); awaited with the first exiles on the news of Jerusalem surrounded by armies (24:1-2); and then heard the news of the fall of the city (33:21).
 - At this time his mouth was opened and he was given words to prophesy about the great hope of the restoration, under terms of a new covenant.
 - § He had already been given to allude to a covenant beyond the broken covenant (Ezk. 16:60-63 cf. Deut. 30:1-10; Jer. 31:31ff.; 32:36-44), but now is given to speak of it in expansive terms.
 - Note the personal pronouns in the Lord's declaration of his action throughout Ezk. 34, and the promise of David as the Shepherd. This is the background for understanding John 10 and similar passages.
 - § Rain and blessing are equated in many Old Testament passages (e.g. Lev. 26:4; Deut. 28:12; Ps. 68:9; Is. 32:15; 44:3; etc.)
 - § The presence of such blessing is in the context of the new covenant promise of a great Davidic King. He, thus, becomes the source and fountain of blessing in the New Testament.
- Ezekiel 36:22ff. Note this in the context of the preceding chapters, where the judgements have been enacted and the enemies judged (the point of Ezk. 35), so the blessing is unleashed.
 - There are promises of blessing; fruitfulness; sowing and harvest; multiplication of crops and herds; etc. Much of this echoes the state of Eden.
 - The reviving of God's people is in terms of his holy name. Here is one of the great contrasts between Yahweh and the 'gods' of the nations. Yahweh is true to his character as the merciful and loving God, as revealed to Moses (e.g. Ex. 34:6ff.), and he is the one who makes covenant with his rebellious children for their blessing and good.
 - The covenant action of God's love brings a heart renewal through forgiveness, expressed in the language of 'clean water' being sprinkled on them, as an allusion to the Old Testament cultus using symbolically purifying water (e.g. Numb. 8:7; 19:13 cf. Ps. 51:7; Is. 52:15).
- Ezekiel 47:1-12 speaks of the River of God, flowing from a rebuilt spiritual temple.
 - Note the connections between Eden and the later tabernacle and temple, and the River that flows from the altar out through the eastern gate.
 - § By implication it is holy, and coming from the altar, takes the cleansing action of that altar/temple out to the world. No longer a 'come and see' but a 'go and show'!

§ This river is expansive and expanding as it goes i.e. it has its own self-generating life. The waters bring life as they go, restoring the blessing of Eden to the parched wilderness of the nations. It even freshens the waters of the sea (of a symbol for the seething rebellion of the nations), and yet there is even provision for salt marshes...salt as an indispensable preservative in the ancient world. Thus, nothing is left to go rancid or to decay.

§ Other prophecies contain similar imagery (e.g. Zech. 14:8) and these allusions to 'living water' are carried through all the way to the book of the Revelation (e.g. Rev. 7:17; 22:1-2, 17).

- Is. 35:6-7; 41:17-18; 43:18-21; 44:3; 49:10; 52:12
 - All these passages indicate a time of coming refreshing from the Lord, where the wasteland and desert wilderness is 'Edenised' by the provision of water.
 - In particular we note that the 'water' is the Spirit (Is. 44:3cf. Ezk. 36:22f.), who is to be 'poured out' (Is. 32:15; Ezk. 39:29; Joel 2:28; etc.)

2. God himself is the 'river' or 'fountain' of life and the one alone who grants eternal life.

- The principle is seen clearly in Jer. 2:13 and 17: 13, for example, and indicates that we have been formed to find our fullness in the Lord and his provision for us.
 - In the forsaking of that provision, the cisterns (idols) cannot provide what alone comes from the True Fountain.
 - There is an significant ANE background to this, regarding Israel's entry into the land and the system of agriculture found there. In contrast to Egypt, where there was an abundance of surface water though not much rain, Israel was dependent upon rainfall. Baal and the associated idolatrous cultus of the high places was the spiritual 'technology' that Israel chose to embrace in order to ensure crops etc.
 - § No doubt in all this the allurements of the worship had its own deceitful action, but the goal was water.
 - § Thus, the forsaking of the Fountain was the exchange of the worship of the Lord for that of the gods of the land.
- God is the River of Jerusalem, and the eternal Fountain for all his people (e.g. Ps. 36:8-9; 46:4-7) in whom we find fullness of joy. God himself flows with all his 'attributes' into the hearts and lives of his people.
 - In this way, we may understand the 'fruit' of the Spirit (singular though multi-faceted) as the outcome of the water of the Spirit coming to us in the word of the gospel (more on this next week).
 - God's saved people are described in terms of 'well watered' gardens (e.g. Is. 27:2-3; 58:11; Jer 31:10-14)