

The River of God

Scripture opens and closes with the same picture. Genesis 2:10 tells us that "a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads," and Revelation 22:1 shows John "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb." Between these two verses lies the whole revelation of the river of God, and it is worth tracing that revelation carefully rather than treating it as a poetic image. The river is not decoration. It is a consistent, developing doctrine of how the presence of God moves, and how that movement is meant to touch the life of the believer.

The river has a fixed source. In Eden it flows out of the garden where God walked with man. In Ezekiel it flows from under the threshold of the temple, from the place of sacrifice and the presence of God. In John it flows from the heart of the believer filled with the Spirit. In Revelation it flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In every case, the river originates in the immediate presence of God and never in human effort or human emotion. Psalm 46:4 confirms this: "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High." Gladness in the city is the result of the river, not its cause. This corrects much popular teaching, which treats revival and blessing as something worked up rather than something that flows down from a fixed source.

The river also demonstrates progression. Ezekiel 47 gives the clearest teaching on this. The angel measures the water four times as Ezekiel moves downstream from the temple. Ezekiel 47:3 to 5 records the water coming up "to my ankles," then "to my knees," then "to my waist," until finally it becomes "a river that I could not cross, for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim." This is one river experienced at increasing depth, and the depth is determined by how far the individual moves from the source, not by how the river changes. The water does not rise to meet a stationary man. Ezekiel is repeatedly told to go further in, and only at the fourth measurement does he lose the ability to stand on his own feet. Waist-deep water still allows a man to control his own direction. Swimming in water does not. There is a depth of the Spirit at which self-direction ends and the current determines the course, yet many believers remain at knee depth, receiving enough of the Spirit to feel supported while still governing their own steps.

The river produces a specific effect. Ezekiel 47:9 states that wherever it flows, healing follows, "so everything will live wherever the river goes." Verse 12 adds that trees grow on the banks whose "leaf will not wither, and its fruit will not fail," because "their water flows from the sanctuary." Fruit that does not fail is not the product of the tree's own strength but of its proximity to the river. This corrects the common error of locating fruitfulness in personal discipline or gifting rather than in continual contact with the flow of God's presence. The tree is not commended for effort. It is described simply by its position.

The river is then internalised in the New Testament believer. John 7:38 to 39 records Jesus saying, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." John clarifies that "this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive." What Ezekiel saw issuing from a physical temple, Jesus locates

within the believer once the Spirit is given. This is a change of location, not a change of substance. The river Ezekiel measured, and the river Jesus promised are the same river, now flowing from a temple made of people rather than stone. Access to the river is no longer geographical. It is a matter of abiding in Christ and being filled with the Spirit, as Ephesians 5:18 commands.

Finally, the river reaches its destination. Revelation 22:1 to 2 returns to the river proceeding from the throne, with the tree of life on either side bearing twelve kinds of fruit, its leaves given "for the healing of the nations." The doctrine that begins in Eden with a river watering a garden ends with a river healing the nations. This shows the trajectory of the whole revelation. What starts as personal provision in Eden becomes, through the temple, through Christ, and through the Spirit-filled believer, a means of healing that reaches far beyond the individual.

The teaching, taken as a whole, is this. The river originates only in the presence of God. It is experienced at a depth determined by how far one moves beyond self-reliance. It produces fruit and healing as a function of proximity, not effort. And it is now located within the believer by the Holy Spirit, given so that what began in Eden might reach the nations. The right response is not admiration but movement, since Ezekiel's revelation came only as he kept walking further into water he had not yet tested.

Questions

1. What does Genesis 2:10 teach you about the true source of God's presence? (**Genesis 2:10**)
2. At what depth- ankle, knee, waist or swimming- would you honestly place your walk with God right now? (**Ezekiel 47:3 to 5**)
3. Where have you relied on your own effort rather than staying close to God's presence, as Ezekiel 47:12 describes? (**Ezekiel 47:12**)
4. How does knowing you are the temple change your responsibility to carry God's presence to others? (**John 7:38 to 39**)
5. In what way is God asking you to let His river flow out from you to someone else? (**Revelation 22:1 to 2**)