

Genesis 2:9–14 — A River Went Out of Eden

The Four Rivers as the Four Gospels, the Order of Offerings, the Coat Without Seam, and the Millennial River

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:9–14; Zechariah 14:8; Revelation 22:1–2

“And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison... the name of the second river is Gihon... the name of the third river is Hiddekel... and the fourth river is Euphrates.”

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1–2)

One River Parting Into Four: The Breadth of Distribution

The river that went out of Eden to water the garden parted from thence and became four heads. This is unusual. Rivers in nature flow together, not apart — streams combine into tributaries, tributaries into rivers, rivers into the sea. A river that divides into four and goes outward is a remarkable thing, almost unknown in natural geography. The breadth is intentional. The distribution is outward, not inward. And four — the number of the earth’s compass, the four quarters from which the winds blow — speaks of universal reach. This river is not content to water one place; it goes out in four directions.

John 3:16 is the scriptural breath of that thought: whosoever. The widest possible distribution of the blessing of God going out into the world. And behind it all is one source: the river went out of Eden. There is one fountain, one origin of all blessing, and it comes from God.

The location of Eden is not recoverable, and this is not accidental. God placed the cherubim with the flaming sword to guard any return to the garden. The flood would have swept away whatever remained. God never meant man to find Eden and return to it. We look not back but forward.

The Four Rivers and the Four Gospels

Brother Roach's paper on the four rivers demonstrates that these rivers, coming from the one source in Eden and going out to water the world, are pointing to the four Gospels — the fourfold presentation of Christ coming from God and going out to the world. The order he identifies is John, Luke, Mark, Matthew — Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, Euphrates — and this is the same order as the offerings: burnt offering, peace offering, sin offering, trespass offering, reading from the highest toward man. The four Gospels, from Matthew to John, run in the reverse order, because there it is man approaching God — starting with his condition of sin and trespass (Matthew, Mark) and rising to peace (Luke) and then to the full presentation of the divine person (John). Both orders are present: God coming out to man, and man approaching God.

The same fourfold character appears throughout Scripture. The four faces of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1 correspond to the four Gospels. The four living creatures in Revelation 4 present the same features, though with six wings rather than four — mercy being swifter than judgment. The four Gospels themselves, then the four rivers in Genesis 2, then the cherubim in Ezekiel, then the living creatures in Revelation: the impress of this fourfold presentation of Christ is woven through the whole book, pointing to one divine Author using many human penmen.

Pison: John's Gospel and the Gold of That Land

The first river, Pison, compasses the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold — and the gold of that land is good. There is also bdellium and onyx stone. Pison means increase, and John the Baptist in John 3 said he must increase, I must decrease. The encompassing character of the river — it surrounds the whole land — answers to the reach of John's Gospel: the world is brought before us frequently, and very early in the book the Lord is reaching out to the Samaritan woman and declaring himself to those who had no natural claim upon Israel's Messiah. The word world in John's Gospel is characteristic in a way it is not in the other three.

The gold is the divine glory of the person of Christ as presented in John's Gospel. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. That is the gold — pure, divine truth about the person of the Lord Jesus. The bdellium, a fragrant resin, answers to the incense of the priestly ministry, and John 17 has the character of a high priestly prayer, though Christ was not a priest on earth. The onyx stones were the stones borne on the shoulders and on the breastplate of the high priest, speaking of his carrying the names of the tribes — his people — on his shoulders and on his heart.

The seamless coat of John 19 belongs here. John alone records that his coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. The soldiers would not tear it. It is the garment of one in whom there is no joint, no seam between the divine and the human. Others have said two natures and reasoned that there must therefore be two persons. The coat without seam refutes it. He took humanity into his person such that there is one person, the God-man, with divine and human consciousness inseparably united. There is no seam. The mystery of the union of godhood and manhood in him is beyond human analysis; we receive it by faith, as Scripture presents it.

Gihon: Luke's Gospel and the Encompassing Grace

The second river, Gihon, meaning breaking forth, also encompasses its land — the whole land of Cush. Luke's Gospel is characterized by the sovereign grace of God reaching outward to encompass those who have no natural claim. A certain rich man, a certain Samaritan, a certain woman — the word certain is characteristic of Luke, speaking of God's sovereignty having his eye upon specific persons and bringing them into blessing. The prodigal son returns and eats of the fatted calf with his father — the peace offering, of which the offerer ate, is the characteristic of Luke. It is the gospel of God's sovereign grace and of joy in the presence of God over that which was lost and is found.

Zechariah's prophecy of the light to lighten the Gentiles belongs here — the vast encompassing of Gentile blessing in the coming millennial day when the Son of Righteousness arises with healing in his wings. Luke's Gospel looks forward to that. The river that encompasses the whole land of Cush is the figure of grace going out without limit to those who were far away.

Hiddekel and the Euphrates: Mark and Matthew

The third river, Hiddekel — the Tigris — goes forward toward Assyria. It does not encompass; it advances. Straightway is the characteristic word of Mark's Gospel: the Lord went and did this, and immediately he went and did that. He was the perfect servant, busy about his Father's works, going forward without the pause of self-promotion. When his disciples came and told him that crowds were seeking him and his fame was spreading, his answer was: let us go to another city and preach the gospel, for therefore am I sent. He was not here to draw a crowd; he was sent to serve. The river that flows forward, not circling, not surrounding, but pressing on — that is the character of Mark.

The fourth river is simply named: Euphrates. No description is given of it — it needed none, being well known. Matthew's Gospel is the gospel of the kingdom,

of fruitfulness in connection with the reign of the Lord Jesus. The parable of the sower — the man sowing good seed in his field, the kingdom of the heavens becoming like that — is characteristic of Matthew 13. It is the gospel of fruit and kingdom. And what is the name Euphrates said to mean? Fruitfulness. Great as his kingship is, it is not his greatest glory. What he is in his person is greater than the office he holds. The office receives its virtue from the person. That is the reverse of how the world works, where men strive for high office without reference to personal integrity. With Christ, the glories of his person dignify every office he bears.

The River at the End of Scripture: Zechariah and Revelation

Zechariah 14:8 looks to the millennium: living waters shall go out from Jerusalem, half toward the eastern sea and half toward the western sea, in summer and in winter. A river going out in two directions from the centre, bringing life in every season. The four of Genesis 2 becomes two here — still going out, still distributing blessing outward, still from a divine centre.

Revelation 22:1–2 gives the fullest expression: a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, going out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, with the tree of life on either side of the river, bearing twelve fruits, its leaves for the healing of the nations. This is millennial, as the healing of the nations implies. The throne is there; the servants serve him; they see his face; his name is on their foreheads. The river still goes out. The tree of life is still there, now on both banks, bearing fruit in every month. What was in the garden at the beginning — one river, the tree of life in the midst — reaches its millennial expression as a river proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, with the tree of life on either side.

Genesis is the seed plot of all of this. The river, the trees, the garden, the man, the woman — all are seeds of what God is going to unfold in history and bring to its culmination in Christ. The one who is the tree of life will sit on his throne of

glory; the river of life will proceed from that throne; his servants will see his face. What was lost through the first man will be more than recovered in the last Adam, centred entirely in himself.

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