

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 248

THE HOLY CITY

(continued)

On a long sea voyage a ship frequently takes its bearings in order to determine its exact position and direction. We have come a long distance on our spiritual journey through the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. We are now almost within view of our ultimate destination though the waters are still deep. As we prepare for our arrival at the not-so-distant shore, let us reflect upon a few of the highlights of this remarkable journey.

We have mentioned previously that John actually saw throughout the visions of the book of Revelation *three* series of dramas, each with *seven* parts. There is the drama of the seven *seals*, then that of the seven *trumpets*, and finally the seven *bowls*. As we meditate upon these great truths, surely we can see that the opening of the seals is *the revelation of Jesus Christ!* HE is the one who breaks the seals, and a revelation signifies an *unveiling*, and it is Jesus Christ Himself, the firstborn Son of God, who is unveiled unto us and within us as the seals are broken. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ, in His glorious sonship, is the first of this trinity of dramas. The real truth is that all our wonderful Father wrought out in the life of Jesus in order to reveal the fullness of God in Him — in sonship — must now be wrought out also in God's firstfruit company of "many sons" brought to His very own glory. God's called and chosen elect, purified, perfected, grown up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, is therefore the *second company* to be brought to full and complete redemption, restoration to the life, glory, wisdom, and power of God! The *third company* brought unto perfection and the fullness of God is the rest of the Lord's people who are presently enslaved in the bondage of religious Babylon.

The point we wish to make is just this: As the loosing of the *seals* brings the revelation of *Jesus Christ*, the first Son, so the blowing of the *trumpets* accomplishes the very same work of God in His called and separated elect, the *many-membered body of Christ*, or the *manifest sons of God*. And just as the trumpets show the work of our Father in His chosen firstfruit company, so the pouring out of the seven *bowls* depicts the deep and awesome dealings of God with the *rest of the Lord's redeemed people — the church!* Thus the seals represent the work of God in and through our Lord Jesus Christ, the pattern and proto-type of our sonship; the trumpets show the work of God in His many-membered son company; and the bowls reveal the work of God in the rest of the Lord's saved people — the seven churches of chapters two and three of the Revelation. These, in their ultimate perfection, become the *bride of Christ* who has made herself ready for union with the Lord. Three series of dramas, each with seven parts! Three is the number of completeness, seven the number of perfection. These three dramas with their seven parts reveal the great truth of God's COMPLETE REDEMPTION AND RESTORATION OF HIS PEOPLE, BRINGING PERFECTION, LIFE, AND GLORY!

There are three stages in the redemptive program (in relation to the church), and a full and complete redemption (revealed in the *seven* steps) wrought in each stage. Jesus has already been perfected, resurrected, ascended, glorified, enthroned, and come to dwell in the midst of His people! Multitudes who read these lines are even now in the *process* of full perfection, redemption, and glorification as sons of God! And our gracious Father has a wonderful plan and purpose to restore all His precious people back into the perfection and glory of God! He will, in fact, restore the *whole creation*, but the three series of dramas now under consideration speak of His dealings with His church prior to the restoration of the world and all things in all realms. God must first bring forth the perfection of glory within His manifest sons and within the beautiful and glorious bride of the Lamb, so that the *nations* can then come to their light and walk in their light, even the light of salvation! Isn't it wonderful!

Never lose sight of the beautiful progression in the succession of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. Each is greater and more far-reaching than the one before! In connection with the seals there is no mention of the *scope* of their effect — for the seals are the unveiling of ONE — the unveiling of Jesus Christ! Under the trumpets, however, we find that their work affects *one third* of everything! One third, but far short of *all!* Beyond doubt, this signifies a select company! But under the bowls *everything* is affected — the whole earth, the entire sea, all the rivers and fountains of waters, the full sun, the very seat of the beast, the full length of the great river Euphrates, all the kings of the earth, the whole biosphere, the great city Babylon, all the cities, all the nations, every island and every mountain — absolute totality — all of EVERYTHING that relates in a spiritual way to the vast company of the redeemed people of God. This by no means indicates that all those *literal* things will be transformed by the ministry of the seven plagues, for the literal things themselves merely point to and represent *spiritual things in the lives and experience of God's people* — and it is *they* who are meant, it is *they* who are delivered, changed, and perfected!

In Psalms 120 through 134 we are introduced to what are called *songs of degrees*. In school science classes we learned a concept of degrees which tells us that in relation to the weather degrees are calibrated in Celsius or Fahrenheit on thermometers which measure the movement of degrees according to temperature. The degrees can go up or down. The *songs of degrees* in the Psalms, however, present a different understanding, for these degrees are *always going up!* Each of the Psalms or "Songs of Degrees" represents a degree or step up the ascending pathway to Jerusalem and the house and throne of the Lord. The people of Israel sang these songs as the caravans of pilgrims made their way up the mountains to attend the three annual feasts of the Lord in Jerusalem. Psalm 84 explains that these people go from strength to strength until they appear before God in Zion.

On what we know as Palm Sunday Jesus began the ascent to Jerusalem to attend the feast of Passover. It was there that as He drew near and saw the city He wept over it, saying, "Would that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!" (Lk. 19:41). One still "ascends" to Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is a city set upon the seven mountains, and from all points of the compass you have to climb to get there. To the spiritual Holy City and Throne of the Lord one ascends also in a spiritual sense! This spiritual ascent from the lowlands of the flesh, the natural mind, the human consciousness, and carnal, man-made religion, is being fulfilled in the lives of the Lord's people today. In this wonderful hour at the junction of the ages, a company of chosen ones is ascending in the Spirit up to the heights of divine life, perfection, and glory!

Seven churches speak to us of different dimensions of spiritual growth and development which all of the Lord's elect must pass through. The Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) means "the out-called" and speaks of people coming out of one realm to come into another realm; a people coming out of one world to enter another world; a people coming out of one mind to possess another mind. Seven churches are *seven stages* of moving out of one realm into another, out of one state of being into another state of being. The reason the Lord selected those seven churches is because He worked out in them the mystery of the overcoming life, giving us seven promises whereby we can be more than conquerors through Him. Each church represents a step *upward* in God! And each promise to the overcomers in these churches is greater than the one before, ending with the promise to sit with Him in His throne, even as He overcame and is set down with His Father in His throne! Ah, as we ascend up the holy mount of God experiencing more and more of His righteousness, power, and life, we sing within ourselves the glorious songs of degrees! As you ascend you will see in the seven churches the unveiling of Jesus Christ! You will also see the veil that hides Him in these churches! And you will see the process by which the veil is removed that HE might be revealed in your life in all of His splendor! This is what is being dealt with all through the book of Revelation — the book of the Unveiling. God is dealing with the veil and the un-veiling of Jesus Christ! Here you see seven stages of the rending of the veil in the hearts of the saints in order to reveal Jesus Christ in His body. Seven is the symbolic number of *completion* and *perfection* — representing *all it takes to complete the process!* Furthermore, each dimension of God's dealings with His people contains these same seven steps — the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials.

Each step in the process of overcoming brings us closer to the authority and power of Christ's throne. We now see a new generation of Israel's pilgrims walking and climbing these steps and degrees to glory! They are the firstfruits, the pilgrims of the new order of the kingdom of God. They are nearing the highest step of the seven, and will soon make their grand entrance into the full glory of God's Christ. Each promise to the overcomer reveals a definite and powerful step in the realization of Christ in our lives. All who are apprehended of the Father unto the fullness of God are diligently walking up that ascending pathway. They are daily applying themselves to this walk! By the strength and power of the Christ within, they are climbing upward one step at a time. As we walk up the ascending pathway to the throne, we experience within ourselves all that each promise to the overcomer embodies. When we have arrived at the last step, we will have experienced within ourselves the authority, power, and dominion of God's omnipotent and universal throne! We will be able by the Spirit of God to rule over all things as sons of God! And, oh yes, we are singing the songs of Zion as we ascend from one degree to another!

As we now approach chapter twenty-two of the Revelation, even a cursory glance will show that it opens as a continuation of the vision in the preceding chapter, and it constitutes the close of what John was shown concerning the new Jerusalem. In chapter twenty-one we witnessed scenes unfolding the blessedness of the life of the new Jerusalem, its dazzling stones, its gleaming gold, its brilliant light, its radiant glory, its holiness, its power, and its victorious, abundant life. And now in reference to this glorious city John says, "And he showed me..." It is the same messenger continuing to open to our vision the wonders of this same holy city. However, there is a new and additional view in this portion. In the previous chapter all was pictured under symbols of beauty, splendor, richness, and unspeakable glory. But now something is added. In this section the life and blessedness of the overcoming saints is described under the imagery of the original garden of Eden, the Paradise of God. The symbolism of the city is not abandoned, as is evident from the reference to the street of the city and to the throne of God and the Lamb and to the nations. But into this vision of the new Jerusalem is injected the symbolism of Paradise, the Garden of the Lord.

There was mention of this already in the letter to the church at Ephesus wherein the Lord Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the *paradise of God*" (Rev. 2:7). And here the Paradise of God is presented as being central to the fulfillment of every promise of God within the holy city, New Jerusalem. This Paradise with its various details, such as the river of water of life, and the tree of life with its fruits and leaves, is not, of course, a literal garden with a literal river and literal trees, but like the rest of the city portray in symbol beautiful and wondrous spiritual realities fulfilled in and through the elect of the Lord. The idea that each of us had as a babe in Christ, our spiritual childishness, of looking forward to that city where we could sit on a park bench by an effervescent river eating celestial fruit from an immortal tree, was used of God to attract us and to lead us into seeking more life in the Holy Spirit, so that He might lead us to the place that He has prepared for us. Just as the Barbie doll little girls play with eventually gives way to the reality of a living, human baby, so, as we make the transition from the carnal, fleshly-minded being that we were, to the heavenly spiritual being we are becoming, let us leave behind the child-like instruments and ideas which must pass away. Let us see beyond the literal letter of the Word and behold the spiritual realities that are God's plans and purposes for our lives. Then let us allow the blessed holy spirit of truth to lead us into the *experiencing* of those spiritual realities!

I once read the account of a man of God who presented a great truth. He said, until Jesus came, in the temple at Jerusalem, every piece of furniture, every curtain, every one of the golden plates and platters, all the incense, the sacrifices, the rituals and ceremonies, and every priestly administration — every one of these outward symbols held a meaning, a value, and a power for the people of God. But when Jesus came, He replaced the temple, He replaced every piece of furniture, He replaced the priesthood of Aaron, He replaced every sacrifice, ritual, ceremony, and ministration and all of those things actually became so much "junk." They had no more meaning, no more value, and no more power whatsoever in men's lives; therefore, in A.D. 70 the Lord moved and destroyed them all and wiped them forever off the face of the earth so that the people could no longer cling to them and those who truly loved God could move on into the spiritual realities that Jesus brought into our world. So it is also in our lives! So it is with the ideas and experiences that we had as spiritual children. They have become so much "junk" and have no value and no power whatsoever anymore, but are as instruments that must perish with the using. They are to pass out of our lives when they are no longer valid in our lives. We are not to look back to them nor esteem them, for we are admonished to *forget* those things which are behind and press forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus! May God make it real to the heart of every person reading these lines, may each and every one let pass away the childish understanding, the carnal, fleshly desire for a physical, material heaven somewhere, built of precious stones and gold, with a literal river and a literal tree of life! LET IT GO!

I have shared the following before but feel to share it again because of its great relevance to this subject of the garden within the city. Some years ago Gene Edwards ministered a word of revelation with which I heartily concur. In the following paragraphs I will seek to share as faithfully as I can from memory the concepts he set forth. I will also expand and enlarge upon his original thought as the Spirit has opened it to me. In that wonderful day when the Lord God planted a garden in Eden for the man in His image, God stood at the boundary between heaven and earth, that is, between the spiritual world and the physical creation, and did a most incredible thing. He stretched forth His hands of omnipotence and took this terrestrial ball in one hand as with the other He grasped the heavenly realm. He moved the two toward one another. He brought the spiritual realm, the timeless realm, the dimensionless realm toward planet earth while He moved earth toward the heavenly realm. The two moved closer and closer until they kissed each other. The two realms met and touched — thus entering into union with one another.

The area where heaven and earth met together and overlapped He called Eden. The place where these two realms met, overlapped, and interfaced became unlike earth and unlike heaven, that which had never existed before — not heavenly and not earthly — the kingdom of heaven on earth! The only thing it can be likened to is the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was visible, even tangible, but utterly

spiritual. He brought His physical body out of the tomb and appeared in a body possessing an earthly form and appearance, but it was a glorious *metamorphosed body* limited by neither time nor space. It was neither a *body* nor was it a *spirit* — it was a *spiritual body*. Here in this realm of which I speak, where heaven and earth meet and mingle, all that is visible becomes spiritual, and all that is spiritual becomes visible. Great is the mystery! Everything upon this earth which is seized upon by the spiritual is transformed by the spiritual, and there is created here the kingdom of heaven on earth. When you take the heavenly and the pristine earthly and join them together, what is formed by that blessed union is far more beautiful and glorious than either!

Consider with me, my beloved, What is the natural habitat of man? He is spirit — therefore his natural habitat is the heavens! He is dust — therefore his natural habitat is the earth! Both? No! Neither? Yes! Neither. And yet, in some strange, mystical way — *both*. This glorious creature God created in His own image and likeness — where is his “home”? Ah — God prepared the place for man as soon as He created man. He created a realm that corresponds to man’s true state for man to inhabit. The earth, dear one, contrary to all that you may have been taught, is not the natural habitat of man. And neither are the heavens the natural habitat of man! The *garden* — and *only* the garden — and no place but the garden is your natural habitat. That’s where you belong — that is your true world, your homeland, your motherland — that unique realm where heaven and earth meet and mingle — the kingdom of heaven on earth! The garden was not heaven, neither was it earth. It was a realm where God could walk, and where man could walk and talk with God in the spirit of the day. It was the dimension of the *spiritual body* — spirit *and* body, heaven *and* earth, visible *and* invisible, tangible *and* ethereal, celestial *and* terrestrial, blended into one. The greatest of the glories of heaven was in that garden — the tree of life was there. And that was man’s habitat. It was not merely *where* man was — it was *what* he was!

This great truth of man’s STATE OF BEING constituting the garden of God is one of the tremendous themes which courses its way like a mighty river through the scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. In the book of Revelation the garden of Eden finally becomes the wonderful city of God — which city *we are* (Rev. 21:9-11; Isa. 60:2,14). “And I saw the new Jerusalem...having the glory of God: and her light was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal...and He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. And in the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 21:10-11; 22:1-5).

How do you suppose the tree of life was transferred from the garden of God to the city of God? The simple truth is — it wasn’t! The garden still exists. The garden is in the city. The garden *is* the city. Have you not been to a village, a small town, and returning forty or fifty years later you find it to be a giant metropolis? The original village is still there — in the metropolis! The garden has grown, increased, expanded, changed, and now it is New Jerusalem! That’s why men have never found even a trace of the original garden over in Mesopotamia though many have searched for it. It’s not on earth *as earth* — for in this city two realms interface once more — the new heavens and the new earth — not two separate entities, but that place where heaven and earth are joined, the Land of the Interface! The garden was there, therefore the city is there. This is where righteousness dwells — the new mind and the new body. That is *your world*, my beloved. You and I belong to an interface. We *are* an interface. We are part heavenly and part earthly; part spiritual and part physical; part visible and part invisible. And no man on earth really knows or understands where we dwell!

What is the new Jerusalem? It is the bride with the Bridegroom, the place of *union* with God in the interface where heaven and earth overlap. We are a colony from the heavens inhabiting the earthlies. We belong to neither and we belong to both. We are *of* the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are *in* the Lord Jesus Christ. He, more than any other man, is an interface of these two realms. *Very* God and *very* man — only the interface can explain that! He is the second man, the last Adam. He reveals within Himself the true purpose of God in man. Only in Christ can one understand the true nature of all things. He is of both these realms and He is in both of these realms. He is in both and He is in neither. It is a great mystery. Oh, the wonder of it! He is a MAN seated in the higher than all heavens! He is a SPIRIT poured out into all creation to fill all things! We who have been born of water and the spirit are of His species. We are bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, mind of His mind, spirit of His spirit, life of His life. We belong to His realm. We walk with Him today in the garden of God, in the city of God, in the LAND OF THE INTERFACE, for it is the only place where we can comfortably move in both realms. And yet it is not both realms — nor is it either realm — it is a combination, a union of the two — a NEW CREATION IN CHRIST JESUS! That’s what you are! You are spirit and you are body. That is our destiny — to be both in union in one in the power of HIS RESURRECTION! That is our habitat. And redemption progressively brings us into our inheritance in this blessed Land of the Interface. The salvation of the soul, the redemption of the body, will complete the work. Let us press on, saints of God! The full splendor and bountifulness of this precious Land lies just before us! As the crab lives in two elements — water and land — so the *new creation man* lives in two elements: the earth and also the heavens!

In the early 1980’s the Spirit gave me the following song which sums up within it the deep mystery of the city of God.

The city is a people
Shining forth in God’s glory,
The gates are an entrance to the presence of God;
The walls are salvation,
Bringing a revelation —
Of the strength of the Christ in whom we abide!

The city is a people
Shining forth in God’s glory,
The street is a walking in the nature of God;
The river of life,
From within you it flows —
Now vanquishing death wherever it goes!
The city is a people
Shining forth in God’s glory,
Each stone an abiding in the temple of God;
The tree by the river,

Living Word of the Giver —
Of health for the nations, all things are made new!

The city is a people
Shining forth in God's glory,
The throne is the power of the kingdom of God;
The Lamb on mount Zion
Is Judah's strong Lion —
And they that are with Him are the sons of God!

THE RIVER

“And he showed me a *pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb*” (Rev. 22:1).

The *river* of the water of life is symbolic of a profuse and constant flow of life, of the continuous operation of the life-giving spirit of God in Christ and in all who are made one in Him. The glorified saints receive and appropriate this divine flow of life, and they also become a source of its life-giving properties for all men and all creation. We are reminded of the well-known words of the Lord Jesus recorded in John 7:37-39, “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and *drink*. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall *flow rivers of living water*. But this He spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” In the light of this revealing passage it is clear that this river of the water of life refers to the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ within those who believe *into Him*.

In beautiful harmony with this great truth of the river of the water of life are the other details mentioned by John in our text. First of all, the water of this river is *clear as crystal*, signifying this life is unmixed, pure, and undefiled. In the second place, John beholds this river as *proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb*. This signifies that this energizing stream of pure, divine life has its source in God through Christ within all those in whom God and the Lamb dwell and rule as the power of their life. It is the life of God in Christ within the in-Christed that flows through the city of God! And the fact that the *throne* of God and the Lamb is mentioned as the source of this river emphasizes that this stream of life flows out from the *power and dominion of the kingdom of God within the elect of the Lord!* The life of the kingdom of God, the power of His dominion within, fills the city and flows out from the glorified saints. This river is represented as flowing through the midst of the street of the city. That, of course, is not to be taken in a literal sense to mean that down the center of Main Street in the new Jerusalem flows a river like the canals which flow through the center of the streets in Amsterdam. Oh, no! It simply expresses the centrality of divine, incorruptible life in the city of God, that is, the life of the Almighty Spirit flowing through the very heart of those who walk in the spirit and in the divine nature of God! And, in addition, the tree of life is pictured as growing on the banks of this river; therefore the tree of life derives its life from the waters of the river, and in turn produces the *fruits of a divine life*. It is life out of life and on top of life — LIFE MORE ABUNDANTLY!

“And he *showed me* a pure river of the water of life.” To every elect saint of God the message is just this: **Show me! Show me** a pure river of the water of life flowing out of your vessel! **Show me** a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out of any vessel! Show me a water that is so swift, so powerful, and so pure that it will wash away all filth, all carnality, all weakness and failure, all sin and death, and impart the properties of incorruptible and eternal life! I can **show you** where the river originates and where it flows — it flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. That's *within you*, my brother, my sister! Ah, the Spirit of God is today **showing us** this mighty river of the water of life, not in some far-off heaven somewhere, but right within the glorious city of God which we are! Aren't you glad!

God gave the prophet Ezekiel a prophetic vision of the glory of the Lord to be revealed at the coming of His kingdom. This vision revealed what the body of Christ would become when its members have been perfected and matured in the fullness of Christ. It is so mighty, so overwhelming in scope, that at the time Ezekiel could neither comprehend it nor explain its meaning. In fact, half way into this prophetic vision the Lord stops, turns to Ezekiel and asks, “*Have you seen this?*” (Eze. 47:6). It is as though the Lord is saying to him, “Do you comprehend the magnitude of what you see? Are you able to grasp the prophetic power of this vision? Do you yet see what the rising of the waters speaks of — how it is going to end? Do you see My glory coming, and the immensity of it? It is so awesome, so mind-boggling, that I don't want you to miss the true significance of the revelation!”

The Holy Spirit of Life was shown to him as a small stream which periodically increased and continued to rise until it became a mighty river. In this vision the prophet was conducted along the river by the angel of the Lord — in the form of a man. Hear now the beautiful description of the river of God in the words of the prophet himself. “Then my guide brought me again to the door of the house of the Lord — the temple — and behold, *waters issued out from under the threshold of the temple* toward the east, for the front of the temple was toward the east; and waters came down from under, from the right side of the temple, on the north side of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around outside to the outer gate by the way that faces east; and behold, waters were running out *in a trickle* on the right side. And when the man went on eastward with the line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were *ankle deep*. Again he measured a thousand cubits and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that *reached to the knees*. Again he measured a thousand cubits and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that *reached to the loins*. Afterward he measured a thousand; and *it was a river I could not pass through*, for the waters had risen, *waters to swim in*, a river that could not be passed over or through. And he said to me, Son of man, **have you seen this?** Then he led me and caused me to return to the bank of the river. Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then he said to me, These waters pour out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah (through the Judean wilderness, into the valley of the Jordan) and on into the Dead Sea. And when they shall enter into the sea of putrid waters the waters shall be healed and made fresh. And wherever the river shall go, every living creature that swarms shall live, and there shall be a very great number of *fish*; because these waters go there that the *waters of the sea (of death) may be healed and made fresh, and every thing shall live wherever the river goes*” (Eze. 47:1-9, Amplified).

What is the meaning of Ezekiel's vision? What is this rising river which flows from the temple eastward to the Dead Sea? The entire scene is freighted with keen interest and deep significance when we realize the river is a prophetic picture. We are looking upon the stream of Divine Truth and Life. I have stood on the temple site on mount Moriah and from Jerusalem I have looked upon the same view which Ezekiel saw in his vision. It is an incredibly dry, lifeless, barren desert area that stretches down the Judean hills to the Jordan Valley and finally to the Dead Sea where nothing lives. How many times throughout the scriptures God is spoken of as a flowing stream of water! “How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men... shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them *drink of the rivers of*

Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the *fountain of life*" (Ps. 36:7-9). These words relate to one thing — that God Himself has flowed out and is still flowing on this earth into humanity as LIFE!

We may ask, In what form has God flowed out? He has flowed out first in His Son, in Jesus Christ; and then He has flowed out as the Holy Spirit. Let us see God's divine order! It is set forth progressively in the book of Revelation. First the Lord says, "I will give unto him that thirsteth of the **fountain of the water of life**" (Rev. 21:6). At first sight this seems no more than that of: "And he showed me a **pure river of water of life**" (Rev. 22:1), or "Whosoever will, let him take of the **water of life, freely**" (Rev. 22:17). Read it again, my friend, and see if you can discern the intensification, the increase from one statement to the next. A moment's consideration will reveal a difference in each successive statement. First we have "the fountain." Secondly we have "the river," and thirdly we have "the water" without reference to either river or fountain. The order is certainly reminiscent of the vision of Ezekiel where the waters increased from a trickle coming from under the threshold of the temple to waters so vast they could not be crossed!

God Himself is the spring, the fountain, the reservoir, the very source of the water of life. "For with Thee is the *fountain of life.*" Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son of God, is the gushing forth from under the threshold, the first visible out-flowing of this divine water. And the Spirit of Christ, flowing through the body of Christ, the church, is the living stream, the river flowing all the time. The "waters to swim in," the river so vast and so mighty that it cannot be crossed, which brings life to ALL far and near, until all death everywhere is swallowed up in victory, is the new Jerusalem people, the perfected and matured bride of Christ and the manifest sons of God! A river is a large stream of water that flows downhill through a channel, within banks. To explain this subtle but penetrating mystery, let us consider the case of electricity. We know that a river has *currents* and is a *current* because of its flowing through a channel. We also know that the electricity flowing into our homes is referred to as *electric current* because it is a flowing energy force that must be contained within some sort of cable for it to be useful. In the case of a fallen power-line or broken cable, there is the danger of electric shock or fire, since the current is no longer contained within its channel, and anything with which it comes into contact will be unable to contain this naked energy. In like manner, the destructiveness of a *flood* is due to the river overflowing its banks — no longer flowing within its channel.

The water is the life, the out-flowing of the Spirit. The banks are the earthen channel, the limits or direction of the flowing. The earth of *your body* and *your life*, precious friend of mine, is the channel through which the stream of God's life flows! In nature there is water in every part of the atmosphere and in bodies of different magnitudes upon the earth, but a river is a *concentrated* and *channeled current* or *stream* of water. Can we not see by this that while God's love, and life, and light enfold and embrace all things, and all people, the River of Life is that River, that special provision and flowing of GOD'S CONCENTRATED and CHANNELED LIFE, intensified and magnified in its movement and power. These currents of God's Spirit which flow out through the people of God are the powers of heaven's own divine life and have the wondrous ability to wash away the very *power* and *effects* of sin and death! Every saint of God should seek that the Lord would open his eyes to show him that those who drink deeply of Him **become the channel by which God flows out to humanity!**

Some years ago I read *The Parable of the Bamboo*. The parable is as follows:

On the hillside in Kushing District the most valuable trees are often marked with the owner's name. A common way of conveying water from the mountain springs down to the villages is in channels made of lengths of bamboo fitted one to the other. A beautiful tree stood among scores of others on a lovely hillside, its stem dark and glossy, its exquisite feathery branches gently quivering in the evening breeze. As we admired it we became conscious of a gentle rustling of the leaves, and a low murmur was distinctly heard:

"You see my beauty, you admire my tall stem and graceful branches, but I have nothing to boast of. All I have I owe to the loving care of my Master. It was He who planted me here in this beautiful hill, where my roots, reaching down and dwelling in hidden springs, and continually drinking of their life-giving water, receive nourishment, refreshment, beauty, and strength for my whole being. Do you see those trees to one side — how miserable they are? Their roots have not yet reached the hidden springs. Since I did find these hidden waters I have lacked nothing. You observe those characters on my stem? Look closely! They are cut into my very being. The cutting process was painful. I wondered at the time why I had to suffer but it was my Master's own hand that used the knife, and when the work was finished, with a throb of unutterable joy, I recognized it was His own name He had cut on my stem. Then I knew beyond any doubt that He loved me and prized me and wanted all the world to know I belonged to Him for some special purpose. I may well make it my boast that I have a Master."

Even as the tree was telling us of its Master we looked around and, lo! The Master Himself stood there with us. He was looking with love and longing on the tree and in His hand He held a sharp axe. "I have need of thee," He said. "Art thou willing to give thyself to Me?" "Master," replied the tree, "I am all thine own but of what use can such as I be to Thee?" "I need thee," said the Master, "to take My Living Water to some dry, parched places where there is none." "But Master, how can I do this? I can dwell in the living springs and imbibe the waters for my own refreshment. I can lift up my arms to heaven and drink in Thy refreshing showers, and grow strong and beautiful and rejoice that strength and beauty alike are all from Thee, and proclaim to all what a good Master Thou art. But how can I give water to others? I but drink what suffices for my own nourishment. What have I to give others?"

The Master's voice grew wondrously tender as He answered, "I can use thee if thou art willing — I would fain cut thee down and lop off all thy branches, leaving thee naked and bare; then I would take thee right away from this thy happy home among the other trees, and carry thee out alone to that far peak of the mountain where there will be none to whisper lovingly to thee, only rocks and grass and tangled growth of briars and weeds. Yes, I will again use the painful knife, for all that tough, fibrous core within thy heart should be cut and torn away, until there is free passage for My Living Water to flow through thee. Thou wilt die, thou sayest in thy heart; yea, my own tree, thou wilt die, but thou wilt awaken to a greater purpose on a higher plane, and My Water of Life will flow freely and ceaselessly through thee. Thy beauty will be singular indeed. Henceforth no one will look on thee and admire thy refreshment and grace, but many will stoop and drink of the life-giving stream which will reach them so freely through thee. They may give no thought to thee, it is true; but will they not bless thy Master who has given them this water through thee? And will thou not give thanks unto Him for thee? Art thou willing for this, My tree?"

I held my breath to hear what the answer would be. "My Master, all I have and am is from Thee. If thou indeed hast need of me then I gladly and willingly give my life to Thee. If only through my dying Thou canst bring Thy Living Water to others, I consent to die. I am Thine own. Take and use me as Thou wilt, my Master."

And the Master's face grew still more tender, but He took the sharp axe and with repeated blows He brought the beautiful tree to the ground. It rebelled not, but yielded to each stroke, saying softly, "My Master, as Thou wilt." And still the Master held the axe, and still He

continued to strike till the stem was severed again, and the glory of the tree, its wondrous crown of feathery branches, was lost to it forever. Now indeed it was naked and bare, but the love light in the Master's face deepened as He took what remained of the tree on His shoulder and amid the sobbing of all its companions, bore it away, far away, over the mountains. But the tree consented to all for the love of the Master, murmuring faintly, "My Master, where Thou wilt...where Thou wilt."

Arriving at a lonely and desolate place the Master paused, and again His hand took a cruel looking weapon with sharp pointed blade, and this time thrust it right into the very heart of the tree, for He would make a channel for His Living Water; and only through the broken heart of the tree could it flow unhindered to the dry, thirsty land. Yet the tree repined not, but still it whispered with breaking heart, "My Master, Thy will be done." So the Master with His heart of love and face of tenderest pity dealt the painful blows and spared not, and the keen edged steel did its work unflinchingly till every barrier had been cut away, and the heart of the tree lay open from end to end and the Master's heart was satisfied. Then again He raised it and gently bore it, wounded and suffering, to where unnoticed it lay till a spring of living water, clear as crystal, was bubbling up. There He lay it down, one end just within the healing waters, and the stream of life-giving water flowed in. It flowed right down the heart of the tree from end to end, along all the channel made by the cruel instrument. The Master smiled and was satisfied. Then the Master returned to His tree and lovingly asked, "My tree, dost thou now regret the loneliness and suffering? Was the price too dear, the price for giving the Living Water to the world?" And the tree replied, "My Master, no, a thousand times no!"

The great difference between one being a *channel* for God's blessings and life rather than merely a *container*, is that when one takes for his own needs from a stream or flowing channel, the amount left for him to draw from is not diminished, nor depleted, but all fullness remains as before. But when one draws from a container, or vessel, then the supply is diminished by the amount withdrawn. The wonderful city of God does not have *vessels* or *tanks* of Living Water, but a mighty **flowing river!** When we become a channel for the blessings and benefits of the kingdom of God, then from out of our innermost beings flow RIVERS OF LIVING WATER! Water that ceases to flow becomes stagnant. Let us be vigilant that we do not let the River of God's blessings and Life Giving Water stagnate in us. It must flow out to creation if we ourselves would continue to drink! God is calling for channels, not containers! We face a dry, parched world! — Author unknown.

I would draw your reverent attention to the source of this river and how it increases as it flows. It begins at the altar of the sanctuary of the temple where the presence and glory of God dwells. It flows out under the threshold of the door. The source of the river is in the glory of the Lord in the heights of the mountain of God! Sir Samuel Baker, many years ago, was endeavoring to find the source of the Nile. Suddenly, while he was traveling up the bed of a tributary of the Nile, he lost it completely. The river disappeared. There was no water. He kept on traveling day after day, day after day, but there was no water. It was simply a dry water bed — a water-course where the water once had been. Where was the source of the Nile? He was talking with Lady Baker about it one night, camping in the bed of the dry river, when suddenly in the middle of the night they heard a cry, "*El Athara! El Athara!*" and someone pulling at the tent poles. "Get out quick! The river! The river!" They all rushed up the banks, and scarcely had they gotten on high ground before they heard the thundering noise of the river coming down the dry bed in which they had camped. In a moment there was a mighty river filling the dry water-course, giving in a moment the answer to the question. Where is the source of the Nile? Away in the distant mountains where snow had melted the water came down in floods!

In like manner, the glorious river of God is first seen flowing out from the exalted heights of the Paradise of God. Since all rivers flow downhill until they reach the sea, Eden in its type would necessarily have been located at a high altitude, in the mountains or on a plateau. The high altitude or "higher realm" of the garden of Eden typifies the kingdom of heaven on earth. The garden is Canaan, the promised land. "A land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Deut.11:11-12). Ultimately, it is New Jerusalem, viewed from atop the "great and high mountain."

God placed Adam the first in the garden of Eden, or the kingdom of heaven, a place of light and beauty, from whence flowed the springs of the fountain of the river of life, the source of living water. Without the garden lies the "lower realm" of earth, bespeaking the human condition apart from union with God, the whole dreadful realm of darkness and death in which is contained every sin, sorrow, tragedy, pain, trouble, sickness, heartache, fear, and torment known to man. The higher realm of Eden extends upward into infinitude, glory ascending above and beyond glory, for Eden is the gate to the unbounded and inexhaustible heavens. The lower realm includes this world and everything in it and all that lies beneath it. It descends into the lowest realms of the bottomless and embraces the outer realms of darkness. And flowing from the highest realm of the kingdom of heaven to the lower realms of the kingdom of darkness is THE BLESSED RIVER OF LIFE! Its incorruptible waters of Spirit and Truth are more real and sparkling and alive than any river of earth. It pulsates with righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost and vibrates with the sheer, exquisite beauty of the divine nature of our great and glorious God and His Christ that is impossible for my poor pen to describe. Its glory surpasses the shining of a million diamonds in the sun, for it is the glory of the Lord God Almighty!

I have shown that the river of life is the stream of the flowing of God's **concentrated** and **channeled life** through the river-bed of the body of Christ. The invisible, unapproachable, and unknowable God is Himself the eternal spring, fountain, and source of the divine life; Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son of God, is the out-flowing from that spring and reservoir of divine water; the body of Christ, the church, is the living stream, the river flowing all the time; and the city of God, which is the wife of the Lamb together with the manifest sons of God, are the mighty waters that flow through the valley and into the sea bringing life to all in every realm, until there shall be "no more curse" and "no more death" anywhere! Under another type we have seen, as did Ezekiel in vision, that river flowing out from the sanctuary or temple of God. This is the temple built of *living stones*, each son of God a stone in that glorious house not made with hands, an habitation of God through the Spirit. There is but one temple, one great high priest, and one priesthood.

The book of Revelation tells us that this stream of living water flows from the new Jerusalem, out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. This is another picture showing us the source of this living water and the channel through which it flows. The water (spirit) flows into us, through us, and out from us. This mount Zion, this new Jerusalem, this city of the living God, this temple of the Holy Spirit, this kingdom of God is composed of MANY SPIRITS that have been quickened by HIS SPIRIT merged into ONE GIGANTIC WATERFALL — ONE GREAT RIVER OF LIFE! That is the mystery of the river's increase! Take the shoes from off your feet, O saints of God, for the ground upon which we stand is holy ground. Put away all lightness of mind and foolishness of religion that with heads bowed down and hearts lifted up in worship God's Holy Spirit may reveal how the life of God flowing in and through Christ and the life of Christ flowing in and through His many-membered body is ONE STREAM OF THE WATER OF LIFE!

This is the river flowing out from under the threshold of the sanctuary and down into the desert and the sea. It is also the river flowing out of the garden in Eden and down into all the lowlands of the earth. It is, furthermore, the river flowing out from the throne of God and the Lamb,

flowing as far as the curse is found, as far as death reigns. The Holy City flows with ALL that God is; even NOW this river and all that it possesses is flowing through the channel of our lives by the moving of God in the spirit. This is the eternal river of the Spirit of Life that flows in the heart and life of every believer and eternally from the throne of God and the Lamb until all creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Already we are drinking deeply of that water of life; by its power we are able to overcome death. The last enemy we must conquer! The complete and final fulfillment of these things is yet to come because we are still growing and maturing. Even now we are beginning to experience a foretaste of the glory that lies before us!

But notice, my beloved, at the center the living waters begin to rise and issue from “under the threshold” of the sanctuary. Not an *overflow*, but an *underflow*, an under-current, deep, mighty, and strong, portraying the real power and depth of the Spirit of Life within, as it surges upward from our innermost being to flow out to the dry places. How silently it rises under the threshold of the house, the stream unperceived at first, but growing deeper and deeper as it flows onward. How imperceptively the work of God begins in us! How silently yet steadily it increases from realm to realm, from stage to stage, from experience to experience! How mighty it becomes ere we are aware of its immensity!

To be continued... J. PRESTON EBY