

The River of God – Week 2

The River of God in the Desert

Rivers in the Desert (Ex 17:1-7; Num 20:2-13)

- Both from post Exodus wilderness wanderings
 - Ex 17 – from the early weeks; Num 20 – from near the end of 40 year journey. What has been learned?
 - Water – God’s gracious provision to grumblers
 - No ref to ‘river’ in Ex/ Num passages; but see Pss 78:15f; 105:41.
- (i) Against the background of the River of Eden
- A continuation of the outflow of the River of Eden
 - Fitting with God’s mandate to humans to fill the earth and rule over it (Gen 1:26, 28)
 - Hope for the transformation of spiritual/ moral deserts

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(ii) Against the Background of the River Nile

- ‘Life-stream of Egypt’
- Significance depends on annual inundation (see Amos 8:8)
- Aided agriculture; plenty fish (Num 11:5) and fowl for food
- Nile deified, personified as Egyptian god Hapi
- The Lord – fountain of living water (Jer 2:13; Ps 36:9) – broke out in rivers where Hapi could not!

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(iii) Against the Background of the Plagues

- Polemic – God getting at the Egyptian gods
- Egyptian deities under judgement of God
- A process of un-creation at work/ reversal of creation
- First plague (Ex 7:17f) Egyptians can't drink from Nile, or eat its fish
- But here the Lord provides water in the desert for his people!

(iv) Against the Background of Earlier Provision

- Marah (Ex 15:22-26); Elim (Ex 15:27) – water and shade
- Could Israel not trust the Lord to provide?

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Some Lessons for Us

- The Lord doesn't deal with us as our sins deserve
- He'll sustain his people in moral/ spiritual deserts

These Rivers in Later Tradition

1. Isaiah's use: 41:17ff; 43:19-21; 44:3ff – no longer physical rivers, but spiritual. Isaiah 35
2. Paul's use: 1 Corinthians 10:4 – spiritual drink from the spiritual Rock who is Christ
 - All spiritual blessings flow to God's people (OT and NT) from the 'struck Rock', the crucified Christ (Isaiah 53:4)

The Egyptian god, Hapi

