



Recently I had the wonderful experience of being able to visit the Niagara Falls, and as I did a bit of research on the Falls and thought about them, I decided to have a look at what the Bible says about rivers and see what we can learn from that for use in our spiritual lives. So the sermon is titled : “The River of God”.

The Niagara Falls are on the Niagara River, which flows from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. Erie and Ontario are two of the Great Lakes, of which there are five. The others are Lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan. Together they make up the greatest body of fresh water in the world – over 1/5 of the fresh water on earth.

Niagara is the second biggest waterfall in the world, after Victoria Falls in Africa, but Niagara has the highest flow rate in the world. More than 6 million cubic feet of water goes over the Falls every minute, or 600,000 litres per second!

Believe it or not, in the winter the Falls almost ice up, at least over the top, an ice bridge is formed across the river. (Until 1912 people were allowed to walk across the icy river and see the Falls, but 3 tourists died in breaking ice that year.)

The Bible doesn’t talk about waterfalls, but it does say quite a lot about swiftly flowing rivers, and they have a spiritual meaning for our lives.

The first rivers mentioned were in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 2:10-14 ¹⁰“A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.”

People have tried to work out where these rivers are, but no one can work it out exactly. I think the general consensus is in Iraq.

The meanings of the river names are interesting.

Pishon Be strong, increase, spread

<u>Gihon</u>	Bursting forth, gushing, grace
<u>Tigris</u>	Sharp, like an arrow, fast
<u>Euphrates</u>	(Eu = good), fruitful, bountiful.

We'll find that rivers picture the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit causes us to be strong; increase and spread; it is like grace gushing forth from God, with speed, making us fruitful and bountiful. And it is sharp like a two-edged sword – the sword of the Spirit.

Let's notice some other references to rivers in the Bible, and see how they remind us of the Holy Spirit.

A river of deliverance for Moses: Exodus 2:3 "But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile."

Joshua 3 Israel went through the water of the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Again: deliverance, promise.

They had gone through the Red Sea in the Exodus from Egypt and Paul in Hebrews compares this to baptism.

Ezekiel 47:1 "The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar."

This is a millennial vision. Water comes from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Verses 2-6 ² "He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side.³ As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep.⁴ He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist.⁵ He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross.⁶ He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river."

The water gets deeper and deeper. This is the way the Holy Spirit should be in us, as we go from the milk of the Word into deeper and deeper understanding, and finally get to the stage of Romans 11:33 "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!"

Verses 7-8 ⁷ "When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river.⁸ He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh."

Talking of the Dead Sea, becoming alive again!

Verses 9-10 ⁹ "Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.¹⁰ Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea."

Rivers bring life "where the river flows everything will live." – Holy Spirit.

Verse 12 “Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Pictures the Holy Spirit, bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit and healing from sin and any problems.

Revelation 22:1-2 ¹ “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

Talks about this same river, picturing the abundance of God’s life-giving Holy Spirit in the Kingdom of God.

Acts 16:13 “On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.”

A river – a great place for fellowship, prayer and evangelism.

Psalm 1:3 “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.”

We are like trees planted by rivers – drinking in the water of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 46:4 “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.”

The river in the Holy New Jerusalem we read about in Ezekiel and Revelation – “The River of God.”

John 7:37-39 shows us clearly that rivers are a picture of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 37 “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.”

Good for us to continue to be thirsty and drink more and more.

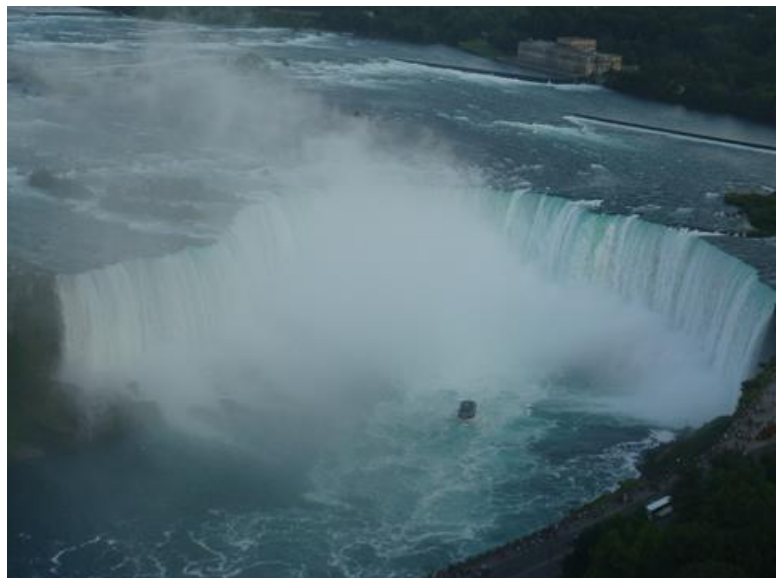
Verse 38 “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

Streams, rivers.

Verse 39 “By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

The Holy Spirit – it is pictured as an OVERFLOWING RIVER or RIVERS!

This is a photo of an overflowing river!



And those rivers/waterfalls flow from within us!

God wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to such a level that it is overflowing and brimming out of us to others around us!

We received the Holy Spirit when we were baptised, so this is something we should already have, abundant in us.

David put it this way – Psalm 23:5 “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

The New Testament often uses a Greek word to describe the way the Holy Spirit flows in us, a word translated “abundant, abounding, exceeding.”

Let’s look at some of those verses to see how the Holy Spirit should be like an overflowing waterfall in us.

John 10:10 (KJV) “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Ephesians 1:7-8 (NIV) ⁷ “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace ⁸ that He **lavished** on us. With all wisdom and understanding,”

(KJV) ⁷ “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; ⁸ Wherein He hath **abounded** toward us in all wisdom and prudence;”

Romans 5:5 “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”
What God did.

1 Thess. 3:12 “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.”
What we are to do! “overflow” = “abound” (KJV)

Ephesians 3:20 “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us,” (the same Greek words)

2 Cor. 8:1-2, 7 (NIV) “And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

(KJV) “Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; ² How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. ⁷ Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.”

2 Cor. 9:8 “And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

God gives us more than we need for ourselves, so we can in turn overflow over and beyond ourselves.

When we receive God's Spirit, we come to a wonderful overflowing of spiritual knowledge. We understand things the world doesn't understand. And we should also have a type of love and kindness, mercy, forgiveness and joy that is greater than others in the world around us have. And we should be able to share that with others. As the fruits of the Holy Spirit are evident in our lives, others will be affected. The river should flow out from inside us to others.

When we were born again God set in our inner hearts a spring of unquenchable water, the Holy Spirit, and that Spirit flows in and out of us continuously.

1 Cor. 15:58 (KJV) "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

John 4:14 "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water **springing up** into everlasting life."

The Greek word says "leaping up" – the same word used of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate when he was healed.

This describes a personal, inward experience. It doesn't mean we suddenly become powerful super-heroes performing powerful miracles.

God usually works as a still, small voice, in a humble rather than spectacular way. But that water should overflow and spread to benefit others around us, as we truly believe Jesus Christ and drink in of the Holy Spirit.

Don't quench the Holy Spirit! Stir it up and let God work in you as rivers of living water!

