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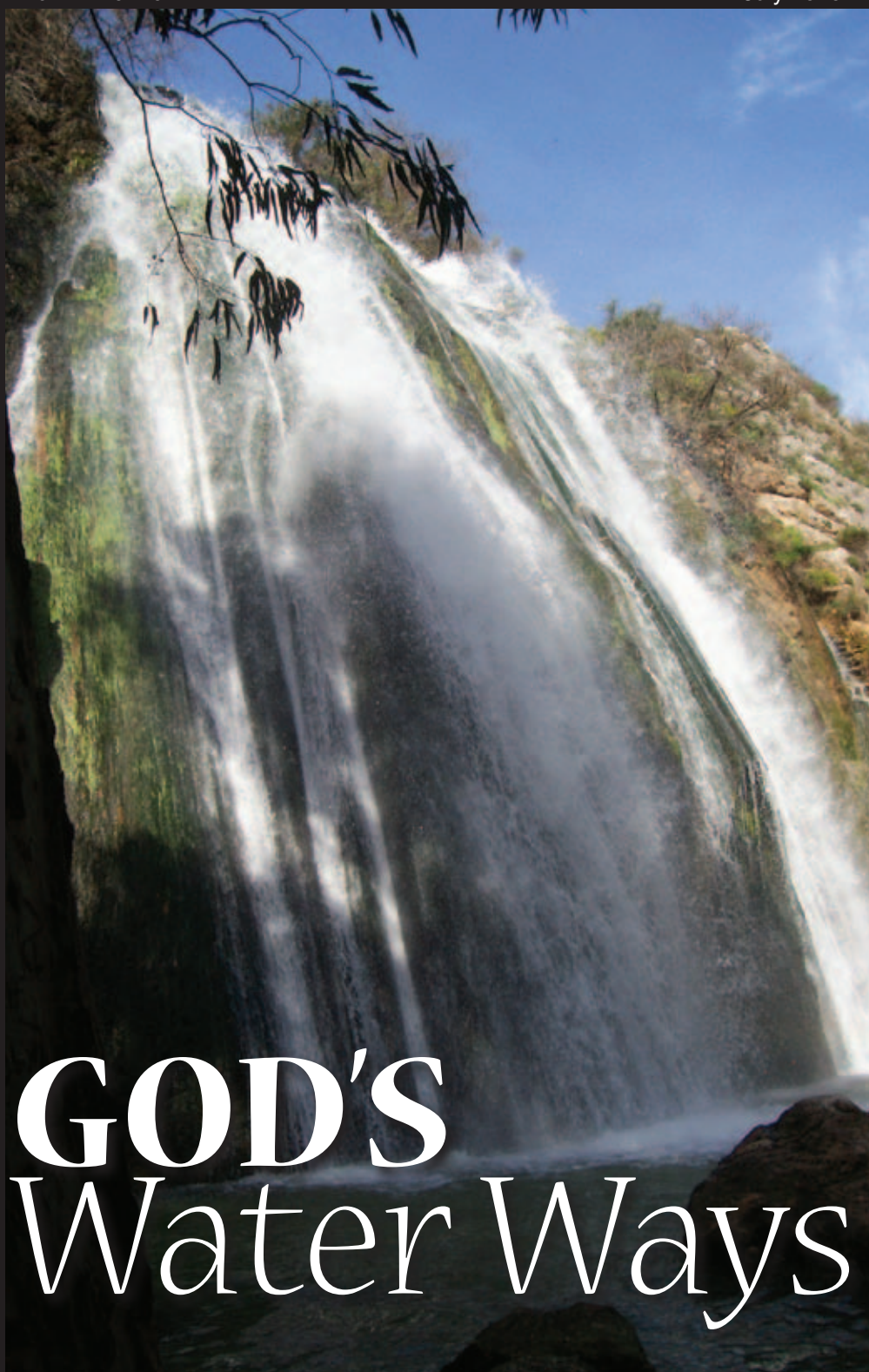
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BRIDGES FOR PEACE

Israel Teaching Letter

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GOD'S Water Ways

Photo by Charleeda Sprinkle

GOD'S Water Ways



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Nachal Sa'ar

I'm quite sure everyone, in some way, has been moved by water: by the mighty roar of a crashing waterfall, the vast expansiveness of the sea and its unending curling waves pounding the shore, the rush of a river over and around unmovable rocks in its winding path, or the stillness of a pastoral pool. If rocks can cry out (Luke 19:40) and trees can clap their hands (Isa. 55:12), then water can surely speak too. It doesn't take much reflection time to hear their lessons on life. They are so simple and so apparent that even an unchurched unbeliever can hear or observe them.

God's waterways not only "speak" but "hear" and respond to the word and will of the Lord. The sea parted and let the fleeing Children of Israel pass through (Exod. 14:21). Water came forth from a rock when Moses spoke to it (Exod. 17:6). The Jordan River "rose in a heap" when the priests stepped into it (Josh. 3:16). Bitter water was made sweet in the wilderness (Exod. 15:25). Yeshua (Jesus) walked *on* water (Matt. 14:25) and turned it into wine (John 2). It's a wonder that all of God's creation, not just man, have the ability to respond to His voice—even praise Him (Ps. 69:34).

God wrote a lot about water in the Bible, using its various forms as teaching tools. Let's see what treasures we can mine through a closer look at this wonderful aspect of nature.

The Great Sea

On the third day of creation, God created the seas (Gen.1:10). The word “ocean” is not found in the Bible, so they would be included in the word “seas.” The greatest sense one gets about the sea in the Bible is its immensity. It’s referred to as “mighty” waters (Exod. 15:10), a “great and wide” sea (Ps. 104:25), the “uttermost” parts of the sea (Ps. 139:9). The Mediterranean is called the “Great” Sea. The “sand of the sea” is used nine times in the NKJV to describe a number that is uncountable (Hosea 1:10).

When God told the Children of Israel that all He had commanded them was not “far off” (too hard to understand or perform) but near to them, He used the sea to make the point of a vast distance. *“Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it”* (Deut. 30:13–14). Speaking of the Messianic era, He again chose the sea to describe how far-reaching the knowledge of God would be in that day. *“For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa. 11:9).



www.israelimages.com/ Eyal Bartov

The bronze laver, where the water was stored in Solomon’s Temple complex for the priests to wash their hands and feet, was so big it was called “the Sea” (1 Kings 7:23). And rightly so, as it stood at a height of 7 feet (2.3 meters) high, was 15 feet (4.5 meters) in diameter at its brim, and a handbreadth in thickness. Plus, it sat on top of 12 large bronze oxen. One of the cisterns under the Temple Mount is so big it’s called the “Great Sea.”

This greatness is what we sense when we stand on a seashore and gaze on water that reaches the horizon. (I have the same sense in the middle of the desert when all I see is sandy, rocky hills.) The vastness overwhelms you, and you feel the bigness of God and your own smallness like at no other time. The ongoing, never-failing rhythm of the waves crashing on the shore reminds one of the faithfulness of God and His vast unending supply.

It’s interesting that whereas the seas and oceans today cover roughly three-fourths of the Earth’s surface, the new heaven and earth will have no sea (Rev. 21:1). *Barnes’ Notes* suggests it’s because the whole earth will then be inhabited in that day, so no great bodies of water will “waste” its space. *Wycliff Bible Commentary* proposes that because the sea represents unrest, death and destruction, and is the divider of nations geographically in our day, that none of this will find a place in the future, final realm of peace and perfection. The prophet Micah says God *“will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea”* (7:19), so maybe having no sea at the end of days is God’s way of showing us just how far removed our sins are. The sea into which they are cast will no longer exist! Hallelujah!

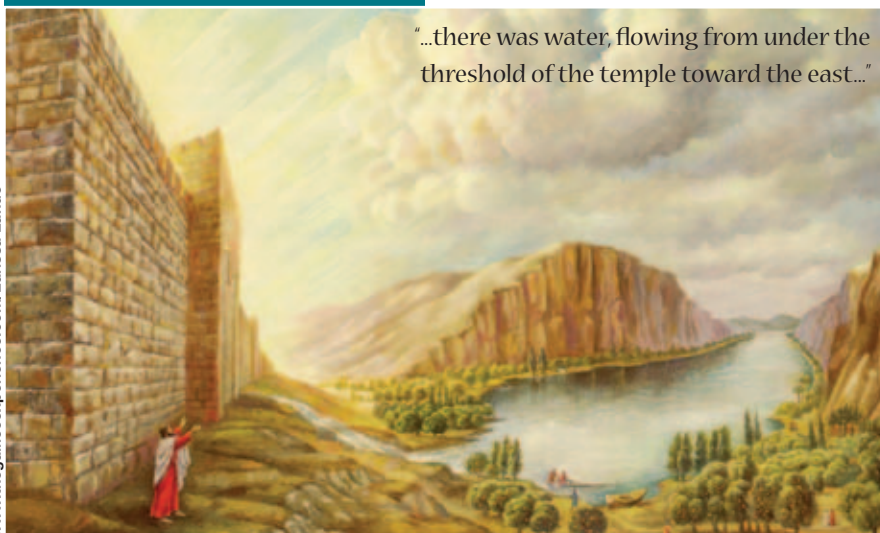
The ongoing never-failing rhythm of the waves crashing on the shore reminds one of the faithfulness of God and His vast unending supply.



Hezekiah's Tunnel



Pool of Siloam



"...there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east..."

"There Is a River..."

"There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God..." (Ps. 46:4). Is there really such a river or is this just figurative language? In the second chapter of Genesis, we are told that *"The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden"* (v. 8). The garden wasn't Eden; it was *in* Eden. We do not know how big an area Eden was, but in it flowed four rivers (Gen. 2:10–14). We know two because they still exist by those names today: the Tigris [in some versions, the Hiddekel] and the Euphrates. The other two, the Pishon and Gihon, have become a matter of much discussion and research, as they are not known today. However, there is some evidence that suggests they may still exist but run underground through the Land of Israel from the north to the south. In the 1960s, deep well drillings showed that there was much more water under the Aravah Desert in southern Israel than previously suspected.

Today, Hezekiah's Tunnel, just outside the Old City walls to the south of the Temple mount, is a popular tourist attraction. It is a 2,700-year-old tunnel carved out of stone in Bible times through which you can walk in ankle-to-knee deep water that comes from a spring called the Gihon Spring. Some have suggested that it could be a remnant of Eden's Gihon River. These are only speculative "clues" at best, but the Bible does speak of a real river flowing from Jerusalem.

Ezekiel sees this river in his vision of the Temple, which fills the last eight chapters of his book. Many believe this to be a description of the Messianic era *"Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar"* (Ezek. 47:1). The further the river flowed to the east, the deeper it became until it couldn't be crossed. On the banks of the river were trees that produced fruit for food and leaves for medicine. The river flowed all the way to the Dead Sea and fully restored it, so that fish could live in it. What life-giving water this is! Joel 3:18 prophesies about this river as well.

In Revelation, where the new heaven and earth are described, we see much the same thing. *"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb"* (22:1). Here, though, we see something we haven't seen since the beginning in the Garden of Eden—the tree of life. Its leaves are also for healing, *"the healing of the nations."* Could this be the restored Gihon? Possibly...God is good at bringing things full circle.

But we're not finished. Let's not forget Yeshua's words spoken at the water libation ceremony on the Feast of Tabernacles. With much fanfare, singing, and joy, the people followed the priest to the Pool of Siloam, fed by the Gihon Spring, to fill a golden pitcher with fresh "living" (running) water. Upon their return to the Temple, the priest would pour out the water at the altar, and they would cry out, *"Save, I pray"* or *Hosanna* (Ps. 118:25). At the climax of this joyous occasion, Yeshua cried out, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:37–38).

Just as there is a river that will flow out of the earthly City of God and the throne of God, there is a river that flows out of every believer. That river's life, the life of Yeshua and the power of the Holy Spirit in us, feeds the hungry heart and heals the sick. We don't have to wait till the end of days to see this river's benefits. Therefore, I believe, we can apply the words of Psalm 46 to us also. When calamity comes and the *"earth be removed...There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God...God is in the midst of her [you and me too], she shall not be moved"* (vv. 2, 4–5).



Spring in the Negev Desert

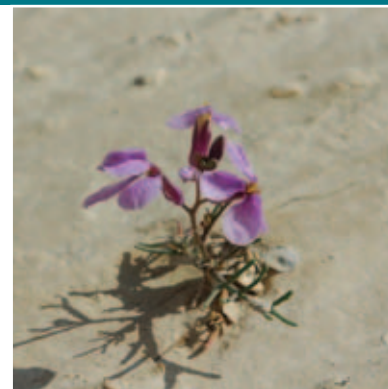
Springs in the Valley of Baca

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion" (Ps. 84:5-7). No one knows where this valley was, but *baca* in Hebrew means "weeping." *Baca* paints a picture of a gloomy valley, one of lamentation and tears, maybe poetically-speaking similar to David's "valley of the shadow of death" in Psalm 23. Since the whole of Psalm 84 is about going up to the house of God in Jerusalem "on pilgrimage"—which Jewish men did three times a year on Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles—it seems likely that they would have had to go through this valley on their way up to Jerusalem.

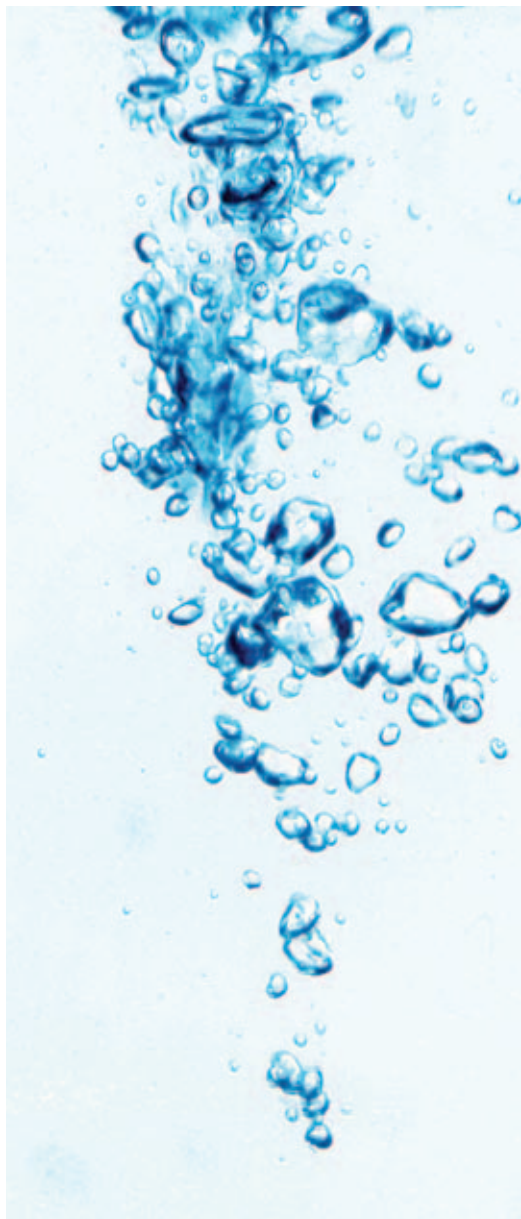
The "valley" could also be just a poetic way of referring to the long, hot, dusty journey they had to take to get to Jerusalem. Possibly it was a place of danger where thieves accosted travelers, which brought up bad memories of loved ones hurt or killed there. Referring to the "pools," commentator Matthew Henry notes that traveling pilgrims might have dug depressions in the ground alongside the roadway periodically so if it rained, they would become pools of water, providing refreshment for the return trip. We do that when we "comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:4).

Barnes' Notes reminds readers that the journey up to Jerusalem was always a joyful event and many sang psalms. The closer to Jerusalem they got, their thoughts would turn from the discomforts and dangers of the journey to the joy of worshipping God in the Temple. This is about a person who can make an oasis in the desert or make a gloomy day full of sunshine. Similar language is found in Isaiah 35 where the prophet promises that one day the desert will bloom, and we've seen this happen in Israel. The passage goes on to say, "...For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water..." (vv. 6-7). That river in us has to bubble up to the surface, "burst forth," during sojourns in the wilderness.

"They make it a spring..." In the days of pre-state Israel, early pioneers could have grumbled and complained about the sorry plots of land purchased at premium prices. Instead of leaving, though, many died as they worked to dry up the malaria-infested swamps. Today, those areas grow crops. Spring-makers don't just grit their teeth and push forward and endure the hard road; they determine the gloomy valley isn't going to get them down. There's nothing more refreshing than a spring in the desert on a hot summer's day. Do our words and attitudes bring refreshing to others, or do they weigh them down with a litany of our woes on a regular basis?



A spring-maker is one who can make an oasis in the desert or make a gloomy day full of sunshine.



James admonishes us: *“Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?...Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh”* (3:10–12). One night I was out with a couple of Christian friends. Through the course of a meal, we discussed the Obama administration, child abuse, abortion, the rise of Islam in the US, and sad cases of parental neglect. By the time I left, I felt I needed a brain bath and walked home trying to remember Philippians 4:8: *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”*

Does this mean we cannot discuss politics or the dreadful issues we are facing in the world today? No. However, we need to be careful of having a steady diet of this kind of talk because it can lead to a woeful attitude that is not edifying for ourselves or others and that can pollute the pure spring in us and keep it from bubbling up with words that encourage and give hope in hopeless situations (Eph. 4:29). What good are we if all we do is speak the same woeful things that those around us speak? Can we instead be ones who sing “songs in the night” (Job 35:10) like Paul and Silas did when they were imprisoned (Acts 16:25)?

We need to “make” a spring by turning conversations around to “good reports,” to say in the face of daunting political circumstances: God is on His throne; He is in control; He will be exalted among the nations; do not be afraid. We are living in the last days, so we can expect even more dreadful things to happen, and they *must* happen if God’s word and will are to be fulfilled. Let’s guard the words of our mouth and the thoughts of our minds and not allow the woes of this world or our own personal circumstances to rob us of the joy we have in knowing the Rock from which our living water flows. Let it bubble up with edifying words.

Pounding, Leaping Waterfalls

“Deep calls to deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me” (Ps. 42:7). Interestingly, this is the only verse that mentions waterfalls, and more interesting is that arid Israel, with so much desert land, has a good number of waterfalls, though many dry up during the hottest part of the summer. While most Bibles note that the source of Psalm 42 is the sons of Korah, the *Artscroll Tehillim* (a Jewish book of Psalms in Hebrew and English) notes it may have been written by David for the sons of Korah to use in tabernacle worship. It is a psalm of distress. Its words could easily fit with the time in David’s life when he was on the run from King Saul. One of his hideouts was Ein Gedi, an oasis in the desert near the Dead Sea. In its hidden recesses, are not only streams and pools but waterfalls.



Ein Gedi

Photo by Jeanette van der Merwe

"From the heights we leap and go,
To the valleys down below,
Always answering to the call,
To the lowest place of all."

Iyon Falls

Have you ever been close to a waterfall? According to its size, its "noise" (which in the above verse literally means "voice") can be deafening, and you can hear it from some distance away as you're approaching it. Once, when I stood next to a good-sized one in Alaska, just below the edge of its fall, its powerful surge almost took my breath away—not out of awe, but literally. I had to back away to breathe normally again. Have you ever stood under one? It can give you a great massage across you're back (or if it's big enough, nearly drown you), but you can't stand under it long because it pounds you incessantly. That's the idea behind the psalmist's words. His troubles are pounding him incessantly, one after another. And yet, the final words of this distressed soul is "*hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God*" (v. 11).

How did this psalmist move from hopelessness to praise? Is it possible that as the psalmist studied the waterfall, he saw something else besides its pounding? Hannah Hurnard did and wrote about it in her classic book, *Hinds' Feet on High Places*. It was the Swiss Alps that gave her the inspiration for much of the book. There she was mesmerized by the waterfalls and stunned by their utter abandonment as the waters leapt over the top edge and fell to the bottom. She wrote their "song" this way: "From the heights we leap and go, To the valleys down below, Always answering to the call, To the lowest place of all." But they didn't leap in dread of being crashed on the rocks below; they leapt with great joy.

This past February, on a beautiful, unseasonably warm spring-like day, I went with a friend to the North and discovered the Iyon (Tanur) Stream Nature Reserve in Metullah. The Iyon Stream from Lebanon, one of the four tributaries of the Jordan river, cuts through a deep gorge, producing four waterfalls. Since I had just finished reading Hurnard's book again, I decided to sit near the foot of the waterfall and watch the water fall, focusing on a small part of it as it fell from the top and following it all the way down. The abandonment and joy of its fine spray, which leapt so far out I could almost see single drops, were so apparent, I laughed out loud. Oh, to be so free to give, to let go, to deny oneself with no fear! When we really know how much we are loved by God, and we let that "perfect love cast out fear" because we know we are totally safe in His love, then we can take that leap and praise the Lord even in the fall (1 John 4:17–18).

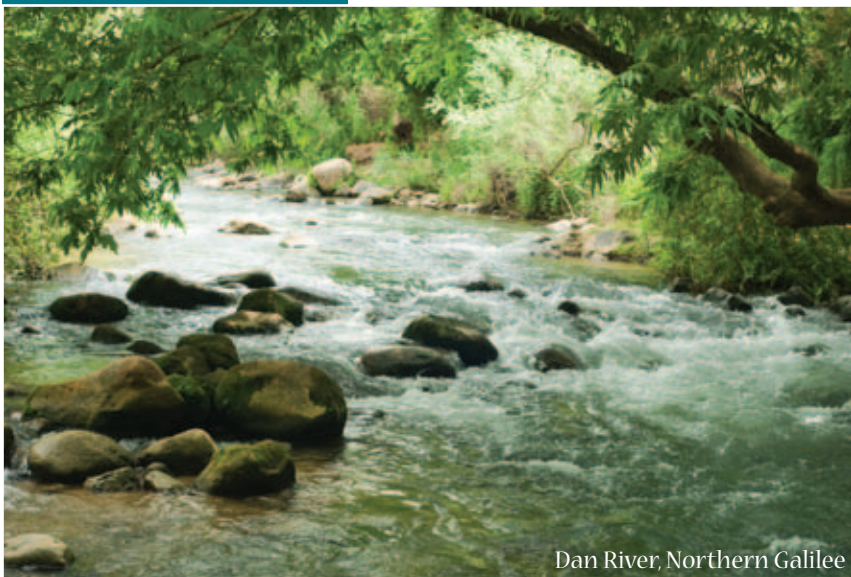


Photo by Charleeda Sprinkle



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Ein Gedi



Dan River, Northern Galilee

Keeping the Water Flowing and Clean

In Bible times, one tactic of an opposing army was to block up the source of water to a city (2 Kings 3:25). From 1964 to 1967, Israel actually waged a war called the War (or Battle) over Water because Syria and Lebanon threatened to dam up two of the Jordan's three sources. Because Israel, Syria, and Jordan have diverted 98% of the river's waters elsewhere with dams and canals, now the once raging river is but a trickle of water, polluted with sewage in some places. It is no different with the enemy of our souls. He not only wants to block the flow of the river in us but pollute it. Sin does both, but John has the answer: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

Another cleansing agent is the Word. Paul admonishes, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word"* (Eph. 5:25–26, also see John 15:3, 17:17). Proverbs 13:14 says, *"The law [torah, instruction] of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death."* The more we read and obey God's instructions—which are not just words on a page as in any other book, but are God-breathed words that contain life as much as the air we breathe—the purer and stronger will be the flow of the living water in us.

By Charleeda Sprinkle, Assistant Editor

The more we read and obey God's instructions, the purer and stronger will be the flow of the living water in us.

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.