

Edenic Four Rivers Motif in the Bible¹

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Introduction

Now in the Republic of Korea "The Four Major Rivers Restoration Project"² is a hot issue. The project was first announced by the Lee government as part of the "Green New Deal" policy in January 2009, later included in the five-year national plan released in July 2009. According to the Korean governmental announcement, the Project has five key objectives as follows: (1) securing abundant water resources against water scarcity; (2) implementing comprehensive flood control measures; (3) improving water quality and restoring ecosystems; (4) creation of multipurpose spaces for local residents; and 5) regional development centered on rivers. It is needless to say that to fulfill this project not only four main river beds but also fourteen tributaries and other smaller-sized stream beds will be dug out and turned upside down.

The project has been already launched. At the ground breaking ceremony of the Yeongsan River restoration project in Gwangju November 23, 2009, marking the start of the Four Rivers Restoration Project around the nation, President Lee gave an address calling the project "not an option, but a must." At this time (November 2010) over thirty percent of the whole project has been already accomplished.

However, from the beginning, this project has met with strong opposition from various communities in view of protecting the environment. Specifically, almost all of the main religious groups, such as Catholic, Protestant, and Buddhist communities, keep pace with each other in their opposition. It is clear that this project will make a direct

¹ This article was presented at the 2nd international meeting of Society of Asian Biblical Studies, which was held on June 14-16 2010 in the Chinese University of Hongkong. I read it at the section of Bible and Ecology on 15th June.

² Han River, Nakdong River, Geum River, and Yeongsan River.

ecological impact on the Korean environment, whether positively or negatively. Thus the heated issue is focused on whether the project would improve the ecosystem, as the government had announced, or whether it would make the environment of the Korean peninsula worse.

When I first heard the title of this project, the idea of Edenic four rivers motif in Genesis 2 instantly hit me. And I was stimulated to examine this motif throughout the Bible. In the Bible there are three texts which are related to the Edenic river motif: Genesis 2:10-14, Ezekiel 47:1-12, and Revelation 22:1-2. I will explore these texts, focusing on the origin of the water and its specific function.³

1. The Life-Giving River from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10-14)

Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates (NKJV, Gen. 2:10-14).

It is widely accepted that the Genesis is composed of two main sections; primeval history (chapters 1-11)⁴ and patriarchal history (chapters 12-50). Thus Genesis 1-2 is the first part of not only the whole book of Genesis but also of the first section of the book. And it consist of two sections; the chronological account of creation (1:1-2:3a) and a human-centered creation account (2:3b-25).

³ Joel 3:18 and Zechariah 14:8 could be included. But here I will deal with only the passages which have the explicit terminological expression, 'river.'

⁴ According to Turner, Genesis 1-11 has a thematic *inclusio*, being 'enveloped by chaos.' He notes that where as Genesis 1 moves from chaos (*tōhū wā bōhū*, 1:2) to order and rest (*šābat*, 2:1-3), Genesis 11 reverses the move beginning with order ('the whole earth had one language and the same words, 11:1) and ending with chaos ('the Lord confused the language of all the earth, 11:9b). See Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 59.

In this second account, verses 2:10–14 describe the four rivers motif. Wenham thinks the narrative flow of chapter 2 "is here interrupted with details about the rivers of the garden." So he understands that "this break has led most modern commentators to conclude that these verses at least reflect a different source from the rest of the chapter."⁵ However here I am going to take an agnostic stance about the source of the document and so will approach to the text as it now stands in its final form.

1) *The Origin of Four Rivers*

Regarding the origin of the Edenic river, there are two different ideas: (1) flowing 'out of' Eden and (2) flowing 'from within' Eden. The idea is decided by how to interpret the text, "now a river went out⁶ of Eden to water the garden (10a)." The phraseology appears to suggest that the river arose in Eden⁷ and then flowed into the garden to water it. If so, Eden and the garden were separate entities, and so distantly located. Many commentators think in this way. For example, Lange says that "according to our representation, the stream originates not in Paradise itself but outside of it."⁸ Wenham, however, suggests a different opinion. He offers "if Eden and the garden were believed to be coterminous, the river must have risen in the garden."⁹

Claus Westermann remarks that "the question whether the river takes its source from inside or outside the garden cannot be answered. It is natural to suppose that it began in Eden and passed through the garden watering it in its course; but the author is

⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–5*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 2000), 64.

⁶ Here the past tense, 'went out' is used. This implies that the narrator speaks of Paradise as a place still existing (4:16), but shut up by means of the cherubim (3:24).

⁷ Regarding the origin of the Hebrew נָחַל, two explanations have been proposed: (1) that it derives from the Akkadian word *edinu*, "plain, steppe," which in turn is a loan word from Sumerian *eden*; (2) that it is connected with the West Semitic stem, 'dn occurring in several languages, having to do with "luxury, abundance, delight, or lushness." See Howard N. Wallace, "Eden, Garden of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:281.

⁸ John Peter Lange, *Genesis*, trans. by Tayler Lewis (MI, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 205. E. A. Speiser proposed that נָחַל אֲרָצָהּ in Gen. 2:10 means 'rise in' rather than 'flow from.' Hence what is pictured here is not a river emerging from the garden, but rather a river that is formed just outside the garden. See E. A. Speiser, "The Rivers of Paradise," in *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, ed. J. J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1967), 23–24.

⁹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 64.

not all that precise.”¹⁰ I, however, agree to Wenham’s idea because it seems more natural to accept that the phrase, $\exists\delta, [\epsilon B]A \equiv \Gamma\forall$ represents that the garden was located *in Eden* as some English versions show.¹¹ If so, Eden and the garden were not separate, but the latter was part of the former.

Although verse 10a tells that *the river* watered the garden, verse 6 portrays that a *mist* ($\delta\alpha\epsilon$) *from the ground* watered the whole surface of the earth. Here the meaning of the word $\delta\alpha\epsilon$ is uncertain. Hamilton suggests that “the phenomenon alluded to in 2:6 would be a subterranean freshwater stream” in relation to the etymological connection with Akkadian word *id*, “river.”¹² Mathews agrees to this understanding by stating that “verse 6 defines the subterranean source of water that blanketed the ground.” He adds that regardless of disputed opinion regarding the etymological origin of this word, most are agreed that “the term refers to either underground streams that come to the surface or a substantial river.”¹³ In any case, a question can be raised: which of the two between the river and an $\delta\alpha\epsilon$ did water the garden? However, these two texts do not collide with each other. Verse 6 can be understood as explaining how the river is supplied. In other words, $\delta\alpha\epsilon$ is the *source* of the water. In other words, as Mathews explains, “the garden is watered (*šāqā*) by a second source (cf. *šāqā*, v. 6).”¹⁴

2) The Function of the Rivers: "Watering is Life-Giving"

The function of the river is 'watering.' The word here is used as a *hiphil* perfect form of $\eta\theta;\pi;$, 'drink.' It is worthwhile to note that the narrative of creating man and trees (2:7–9) is bracketed by 'watering' (v. 6 and v. 10). Verse 6 describes that a mist from the 'earth ($\exists\rho,\alpha$)' watered the whole face of the 'ground ($\eta\mu;\delta;\alpha$).' Subsequently, v. 7 and v. 9 respectively continue to depict that man was formed by Yahweh Elohim from

¹⁰ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, translated by John J. Scullion S. J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 216.

¹¹ For example, 'a garden eastward in Eden' (KJV, NKJV), 'a garden in the east in Eden' (NIV), 'a garden eastward, in Eden' (ASV), 'a garden toward the east, in Eden' (NASB), 'a garden in Eden, in the east' (RSV).

¹² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 155.

¹³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–4:26* (The New American Commentary, volume 1; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 195.

¹⁴ Mathews, *Ibid.*, 207.

the dust of the 'ground' and all kinds of trees were made to grow also out of the 'ground.' Hence not only man but also trees were made from the 'ground' which was watered by a mist from the earth. This means that 'watering' is a kind of Yahweh's preliminary act of life-giving for creating man and trees.

Verse 10 confirms the function of the river as 'watering.' Specifically, it focuses on the garden of Eden, which is pictured in verse 8. It seems to explain how life is given to the garden. Verse 6 gives the information in advance, explaining that 'watered ground' is the original source of man (v. 7) and trees (v. 9), but verse 10 explains afterwards how the garden, which was planted in Eden (v. 8), was watered. In any case, it is clear that the text is deliberately designed to stress that 'watering' is essential even in an ideally created world. Needless to say, the reason why 'watering' is emphasized is that it is life-giving.

According to the description of the text, there was only one united river in Paradise itself. "And from there it parted and became four riverheads (10b)". On its going out of the garden, the river divided itself and became four branched rivers. As Westermann aptly remarks, "the river that waters the garden becomes subsequently the source of the rivers that water the world."¹⁵ In other words, one stream-head became four head-streams.

The narrative relates the geographical location of four rivers (Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel,¹⁶ and Euphrates) to three regions (Havilah, Kush,¹⁷ and Assyria). And so many scholars have tried to identify them.¹⁸ However, I will here focus on exploring the features of the text itself rather than on identifying their locations.

¹⁵ Westermann, *Ibid*, 215.

¹⁶ *Hiddekel* occurs in Dan 10:4 as the Hebrew name for Tigris. In the inscription of Darius it is called *Tigrâ*.

¹⁷ "Kush" is often incorrectly translated as Ethiopia, which was also known as Cush, but in this case thought to be referring to Cossaea which, unlike Ethiopia, does lie within the region being described. See E. A. Speiser, *The Rivers of Paradise*, reprinted in R. S. Hess & D. T. Tsumura (eds.).

¹⁸ I think that all the trial to identify the location of Eden and rivers turned out to be an error. The latter two rivers named, Tigris and Euphrates rivers, can be clearly identified. But the difficulty of identification comes from the first two rivers, because "Pishon" and "Gihon" are unknown. Their etymological analysis is of no use in locating them geographically. Regarding the perplexing

Given the fact that commonly a 'river' is formed by the joining up of small tributaries, it is meaningful that the word, 'heads (!ψπιαρ) is here used. It signifies that these rivers will do 'giving' rather than 'receiving.' Specifically, the first two rivers are depicted to "compass (ββασ;)" the whole land of Havilah and Cush respectively. The Hebrew word ββασ; may be interpreted as a circuitous flowing round.¹⁹ This would mean that the life-giving function of rivers comes to be universal. In other words, the river sends forth its own peculiar blessings to the world through the flowing of the four streams. Therefore it is pertinent to say "its division into four streams may suggest the idea of completeness and the universality of the river."²⁰

2. *The Life-Restoring River from the Ezekiel Temple (Ezek. 47:1-12)*

Ezekiel 47:1-12, which provides the vivid visionary descriptions of the life-restoring river, is a part of the so-called vision of the Ezekiel Temple. Thus it would be necessary to look into first the textual position of this vision within Ezekiel 40-48.²¹

It is well known that many source-oriented scholars reckon that Ezekiel 40-48 do not contain the same ideas and concerns as the previous parts of the book and so regard them as later additions²² or non genuine.²³ Furthermore, it is also thought that

variety of scholarly opinions about geographical identification of four rivers, see Adam Clarke, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1974), 43.

¹⁹ It is also used in the sense of 'surrounding on one side.' The word may also denote a winding passage through (Isa 23:16).

²⁰ Wenham, *Genesis*, 65. The idea that streams flow from one river is also represented in Ps 46:5, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

²¹ See Kim, Sanglae, "The Heavenly Sanctuary/Temple in the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. dissertation, Sheffield University, 2002), 194-196.

²² This means that they deny that Ezekiel 40-48 belong to Ezekiel. Probably in modern research G. L. Oeder (1756) is the first representative scholar who separates Ezekiel 40-48 from the rest of the book. His idea was published posthumously by G. J. L. Vogel *Freie Untersuchung über einige Bücher des AT. IV* (Halle, 1771), 341-88. For further information about this opinion during 18-19th century, see Shalom Spiegel, 'Ezekiel or Pseudo-Ezekiel', *HTR* 24 (1931), 245-321.

²³ Regarding those who recognize non-genuine parts of Ezekiel 40-48, see J. B. Harford, *Studies in the Book of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935); I. G. Matthews, *Ezekiel* (American Commentary on the Old Testament; Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1939); William A. Irwin, *The Problem of Ezekiel: An Inductive Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

within these nine chapters disconnected topics are arrayed without coherence.²⁴ For example, Patton notes that this section is composed of "an amalgam of disparate units."²⁵ In particular, a large group of source-oriented scholars claim that on the basis of literary style and content many parts in these chapters do not suit a vision.²⁶

However, in its present final form, the organic unity between chapters 40–48 and the previous chapters is made clear by the narrator himself. He speaks of the return of the divine effulgence from the east in 43:3: "The vision I saw is like the vision which I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and like vision which I had seen by the river Chebar." For this reason, it is affirmed that "there can be no doubt that it is structurally and thematically an integral part of the book."²⁷

As for the internal coherence, it seems clear that those chapters of 40–48 center on the temple.²⁸ Nonetheless, there has also been heated debate about the unity of the section. Tuell has championed both sides of the debate. At first, he regarded the text as a 'crazy-quilt' that is 'too vague, too disparate in nature',²⁹ but ten years later, he showed how these chapters have a "purposive unity," calling the section "Temple Vision."³⁰ Therefore it is quite reasonable to accept Ezekiel 40–48 as having a self-contained unity.

²⁴ For example, George R. Berry ("The Authorship of Ezekiel 40–48", *JBL* 34 [1915], 17–40) suggests that Ezekiel 40–48 are the work of two principal authors, or possibly more, and belonged to the Greek period, probably the Maccabean period. Regarding his argument about the period of the work, see *idem*, "The date of Ezekiel 45:1–8a and 47:13–48:35," *JBL* 40 (1921), 70–75; *idem*, 'Was Ezekiel in the Exile,' *JBL* 49 (1930), 83–93.

²⁵ Corrine L. Patton, *Ezekiel's Blueprint for the Temple of Jerusalem* (PhD. diss., Yale University, 1991), 145.

²⁶ See G. A. Cooke, 'Some Considerations on the Text and Teaching of Ezekiel 40–48', *ZAW* 42 (1924), 105–115; Steven Shawn Tuell, 'The Temple Vision of Ezekiel 40–48: A Program for Restoration', *Proceedings Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society* 2 (1982), 96–103.

²⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (IBC, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 193. Regarding the argument for the thematic linkages between Ezekiel 40–48 and the rest of the books, see Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 92–103.

²⁸ Leslie C. Allen (*Ezekiel 20–48* [WBC; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990], 213) says, "The whole section is oriented toward the theme of the temple'.

²⁹ Steven Shawn Tuell, *The Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 40–48* (HSM 49; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 13.

³⁰ Steven Shawn Tuell, "Temple Vision of Ezekiel 40–48: A Program for Restoration," *Proceedings Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society* 2 (1982), 96–103.

Haran supports this thematic unity of the section which has a chain of three consecutive series; the form of the temple (40:1-44:3), temple procedures (44:4-46:24) and the land and capital city (47-48). The section can be also subdivided as follows: (1) an architectural description of the new temple (40-42); (2) priestly oracles in the new temple (43-46); (3) and the relation of the temple and the land in a new configuration of tribal territories (47-48).³¹ Regardless of the difference of subdivision, it is common to see Ezekiel 47-48 as another self-contained unit within 40-48. Ezekiel 47:1-12 is the first primary unit of this last subdivision of the temple vision.

1) *The Origin of the River*

The prophet was brought again to the door of the house and there he beheld that "waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward." The prophet returned from inspecting kitchens in the outer court (46:21) and now stood at the entrance to the nave of the temple. There he saw that waters issued out from the threshold of the 'house' and more and more increased to finally become the river (v. 5). Since "the water that issues from the temple or sanctuary (vv 1, 12) provides a framework for the whole piece," it is important to note the significance of the temple or sanctuary as the source of the water.

In this pericope, the text itself clarifies that 'the house' (τψIBεηε) in v. 1 is identical with 'the sanctuary' (αΔ;θ]Mηει) in v. 12. The vision describes the temple or sanctuary as the source of the waters. Therefore it would be necessary to explore the meaning and the relationship of these two words. As the chart below shows, in the NIV, whereas εΦΔ:θιμ (pl. {ψιεΦΔ:θιμ) is translated 'sanctuary' or 'holy place,' τψαB is chiefly translated 'temple' or 'palace' when not being used in its most frequent meaning, 'house'.

► The main translations from εΦΔ:θιμ and τψαB in NIV

	Sanctuary(s)	Temple(s)	Palace(s)	Holy place(s)	House(s)
εΦΔ:θιμ (75)	61(4)	1		2 (1)	

³¹ Menahem Haran, "The Law-Code of Ezekiel 40-48 and its Relation to the Priestly School," *HUCA* 50 (1979), 45-71 (53).

τιψαB (2045)	2	436 (2)	20		770 (81)
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This indicates that, in the NIV, the word ‘sanctuary’ renders an underlying Hebrew term $\Xi\phi\Delta:\theta\iota\mu$, while the word ‘temple’ principally reflects the underlying Hebrew term $\tau\iota\psi\alpha B$. Therefore the meaning of $\Xi\phi\Delta:\theta\iota\mu$ is limited to ‘sanctuary’/‘holy place.’ However when $\tau\iota\psi\alpha B$ is used to designate a location set aside as holy, being dedicated to a deity, it is translated ‘sanctuary’ or ‘holy place’; otherwise it might be a human habitation without the connotation of holiness. Although the English words ‘sanctuary’ and ‘temple’ differ in their semantic fields, they can be used as synonymous when they describe an entire edifice, the dwelling-place of a deity (*domus dei*), and the place of worship of an assembly (*domus ecclesiae*).

In this text of Ezekiel temple, it is described that the temple or sanctuary is the source of life-giving. The last passage of the given text confirms it by stating that "because their water flows from the sanctuary, the leaves of all kinds of trees will not wither, their fruit will not fail, and will bear every month."

The text describes the direction of the flowing of waters in detail (vv. 1–4). As Allen points out, this direction would imply "the route that Yahweh had traveled in his return to the temple (43:1–5)."³² If so, it means that in retracing Yahweh's path the stream flows with the very presence of God.

2) The Function of the River: "Life-Restoring"

From verse 5 onwards the "water ($\iota\psi\iota\mu\alpha$)" had risen enough to swim in and had become a "river ($\lambda\phi\alpha\nu$)," and finally it reached the "sea ($\iota\psi$:)" (v. 8). Verses 8–12 provide a clear implication regarding the function of the river as "life-restoring." The river has a dual reviving function: (1) the water's restoration of the Dead Sea (9–10), and (2) the growing of the trees beside the river (7, 12).

Verse 8, "these waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed," is expanded by a double elaboration, in terms of fish in verses 9–10 and residual salt in verse 11. The elaboration is rhetorically tied to verse 8 by an initial

³² Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48* (WBC, 29; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 213.

echo of "these waters" (vv. 8-9) and a closing echo of the earlier verb of healing or purification (v. 8; v. 11). The block of verses 8-11 and the statement of verse 12 both culminate in cases of *lamed* of purpose ("for salt"/"for food..."for healing"). The text describes as follows: "they will be given over *to salt*. Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used *for food*; ...Their fruit will be *for food*, and their leaves *for medicine* (vv. 11-12)." Briefly, the river gives 'life' again to the 'dead' Sea. The inflow of the river revives the dead Sea. Therefore the essential function of the river depicted in this text is "life-restoring."

Also, it is notable that from this temple a river of healing water flows. The river issues a life-giving stream. It produces not only many trees along its bank but also an abundance of fish in its waters. This means that the temple is connected to fertility in this vision. Also, wherever this stream goes, everything will be healed. The trees provide fruit every month and its leaves are used for medicine. This means that there will be a transformation of the physical world by ideal recovering and restoration. This fructifying river is strongly reminiscent of the primeval rivers in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2. The healing stream restores the entire earth to Edenic beauty³³. In this sense, as Klein proposes, this transformation can be called 're-creation' or 'new creation.'³⁴

3. The River of Eternal Life from the Throne of God (Rev. 22:1-2)

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (NKJV, Rev. 22:1-2).

It is clear that the motif of "pure river of living water" in Rev. 22:1-2 is reminiscent of the primeval life-giving river flowing from the garden of Eden in Genesis 2 and the

³³ Levenson has explored the motifs of creation in Ezekiel 40-48, pointing to the Eden traditions. Jon D. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), 3-16.


³⁴ Ralph W. Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1963), 282.

ideal life-restoring river flowing from the temple in Ezekiel 47. The picturesque description of a river of living water in this text is closely associated with the imagery of the garden of Eden. And there is obviously an exact connection between the tree of life in this text and all kinds of trees in Ezekiel 47. Ranko Stefanovic summarizes this understanding aptly.

John takes this picture from several Old Testament texts. First of all, the picture shows the river flowing from Eden which watered the garden and made it fruitful (Gen. 2:10). A stronger allusion to the river flowing the temple and giving life to all appears in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 47:1-12).³⁵

1) The Origin of the River

In this vision it is depicted that the river flows from the "throne of God and of the Lamb." As mentioned above, it is true that the river flowing from the throne is an allusion to Ezekiel's vision of the river which flows from the ideal temple and is a symbol of abundant fertility. But the author of the present text cannot have the picture of the river flowing from the 'temple,' because there is no temple in the New Jerusalem (21:22). So he substitutes the throne of God for the temple. The fact that the river flows from the throne means clearly that the Seated One is the source of all life.

Here the throne in view is a single,  Thus the expression, "throne of God and of the Lamb" signifies that the throne is shared by both God and the Lamb. This is the first time in the book of Revelation that the throne is referred to as "the throne of the Lamb." Up to this point, the throne has been the symbol of God the Father's rulership. In Revelation 3:21, however, it is made clear that Christ took his seat on the Father's throne as the co-ruler. Thus the throne is now referred to as the ruling seat of both the Father and the Lamb. By sharing the throne of God, the Lamb also shares the sovereignty of God. Therefore It is very significant to note that the river flows from the one throne which is shared by God and the Lamb.

³⁵ Ranko Stevanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 592. He remarks also "It also reminds us of other Old Testament texts that speak of the river of living waters flowing out from the restored Jerusalem and making the land fruitful (cf. Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8)." Hence it is worthwhile to note its relationship with the ideas represented these two texts.

2) *The Function of the River: Healing of the Nations*

Verse 2 depicts that by the flowing of a river of the water of life in the center of the main street of the new Jerusalem, "on either side of the river was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month." Here "all kinds of trees" in Ezekiel 47:12 is slightly and subtly modified into the singular form, 'the tree of life.' Stefanovic thinks that "clearly one tree is on both sides of the river."³⁶ It is, however, more reasonable to understand that the term 'tree (☒◆❖●□■)' is used as a collective term which means 'plural.' The singular 'tree' for many trees is customarily used in Scripture.

The tree of life is described as producing "twelve kinds of fruit, each yielding its fruit each month." The fact that the tree of life bears twelve different kinds of fruit (&🌀◻◻◻◆=✂️ 🏹❖♣️&🌀) represents that the tree in the new Jerusalem bears the fruits even more miraculously than trees do beside the river in Ezekiel's temple vision. It is because the trees in Ezekiel's temple vision yield the same fruit each month.³⁷ It is described that its leaves are "for the healing of the nations." This clause is also an allusion to Ezek 47:12, "their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." However the phrase, "of the nations," is added. Of course, this kind of modification and addition is deliberately done by the author. To begin with, it does not mean that the leaves of the tree of life have a healing power to prevent disease. Healing would not be required any more in the new Jerusalem. With the annihilation of evil, sickness and death have been forever removed. It figuratively represents the "removal of all national and linguistic barriers and separation" and "the breaches between nations."³⁸

In this text, the exact placement of river is not clear. If the phrase, “in the middle of its street,” goes with the previous verse, then the river would flow down the center of a wide avenue. If it is taken with the subsequent verse, the street and river will run abreast, with the trees in between.³⁹ Regardless of the specific geographical layout, it is clear that the pure river makes the tree of life bear twelve fruits. Briefly, because there

³⁶ Stevanovic, *ibid.*

³⁷ Miraculous fecundity is often associated with the *eschaton*.

³⁸ Stefanovic, *ibid.*

³⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 387.

is a river of water of life, there is the tree of life. Therefore, the healing of the nations is fulfilled not only by the tree of life but also by the river of life. When it heals everything which sin caused, the function of the river of life is fulfilled.

4. Conclusion

The Edenic river motif is repeatedly referred to throughout the Bible in Genesis 2, Ezekiel 47, and Revelation 22. However, the stressed points regarding the origin and the function of the river in each text are different.

As for the origin of the water, each river flows from 'Eden,' 'temple,' and 'throne' respectively. 'Eden' reminds us of God as the Owner, Giver, and Master. 'Temple' stands for the One who dwells in it as a Deity. 'Throne' represents that the One who is seated on it is the King. This means that the all Edenic rivers in the Bible are divinely oriented.

As for the function of the river, the river from Eden is for 'life-giving,' the river from Ezekiel temple is for 'life-restoring,' and the river from the throne of God and of Lamb is for 'healing of the nations.' To perform its function rightly, it is indispensable that every river flow in its proper direction.

In the Bible, the Edenic four river motif is used to describe the ideal ecological environment for human beings. I hope that the Korean government ruminates on all these biblical ideas when they propel "the Four River Restoration Project," which happens to coincide with the biblical "Edenic Four River Motif."

Abstracts

The Edenic river motif is repeatedly referred to throughout the Bible in Genesis 2, Ezekiel 47, and Revelation 22. However, the stressed points regarding the origin and the function of each river are different.

As for the origin of the water, each river flows from 'Eden,' 'temple,' and 'throne' respectively. 'Eden' reminds us of God as the Owner, Giver and Master. 'Temple' stands for the One who dwells in it as a Deity. 'Throne' represents that the One who is seated on it is the King. This means that the Edenic rivers are divinely oriented.

As for the function of the river, the river from Eden is for the 'life-giving,' the river from Ezekiel temple is for the 'life-restoring,' and the river from the throne of God and of Lamb is for the 'healing of the nations.' To fulfill its function rightly, it is indispensable that the river flow in proper direction.

Key Words

Edenic four rivers

Pishon

Gihon

Hiddekel

Euphrates

Origin of water

Function of river