



# STREAM DEVOTIONAL

JEREMIAH 17:7-8

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

## EXPERIENCE

The past week has been unusually hot here in the mountains of Western Pennsylvania. What were the temperatures near you recently? At some point, if not already, the heat waves of summer will hit hard! Where do you go for cool refreshment? Fleeing to air-conditioned spaces is common, but the coolness of mountain streams is a great natural alternative.

Following an afternoon of working in 90-degree heat, I hiked up a trail beside one of my favorite creeks. Descending from the trail to the creek was an experience of immediate relief. The air temperature along the creek felt about 10 degrees cooler. Jumping into the water

was a welcome shock to my overheated body. I came up from the water refreshed, renewed, and feeling restored. It was not just the brisk temperature of the water that restored me, but also the rhythmic sound of splashing, cascading water and all the surrounding beauty afforded by the stream. The greens and grays, the blues and browns all combined in picturesque summer loveliness.

I was not the only person seeking such relief that day. As I passed popular streams on the way home, roadside parking spaces were brimming. Like me, many others sought escape from the heat at these refreshingly cool water havens scattered amidst the mountains.

A few days later, I set out to explore a trail by a creek that I had never seen before. The map showed a waterfall, so I was anticipating another refreshing dunk in the pool beneath the falls. When I descended the trail to the spot of the waterfall, I found a meager amount of water dripping into a pool only ankle deep. The water was cool, but lack of volume prohibited any significant refreshment and restoration.

## CONTEMPLATION

Streams have always served as a refuge from heat and a place to seek refreshment. Backyard pools, waterparks with slides, and air-conditioned living rooms were not an option in ancient Israel! Streambeds filled with water were a welcome break from extended periods without ample water. Streams were a symbol of restored vitality after seasons of heat and drought.

In 1 Kings 17, the Lord tells the prophet Elijah to go to the brook Cherith. Amidst drought causing heat, Elijah drinks from the stream and enjoys a refreshing retreat that prepares him to re-engage his calling to do the work of God, especially his showdown on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal (where rivulets of water played a significant role in the display of God's glory).<sup>1</sup>

The prophet Jeremiah, who was not a stranger to drought (see Jeremiah 14:1), wrote about the life-sustaining and restorative quality of streams in 17:8 and 31:9. In chapter 17, Jeremiah likens a person who trusts in their own strength to a shrub that dwells in parched places and is unable to see good. He contrasts the shrub with a person who is like a tree planted by a stream. Sustained by the stream, the tree flourishes and is fruitful even when "the heat comes". Jeremiah says that this blessed man is one who trusts in the Lord.

In chapter 31, Jeremiah wrote of God as Shepherd bringing his sheep, the people of Israel, back to their land. This picture of restoration for the people begins with God saying that he will "make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble" (v.9). The brooks of water serve as a vivid emblem of God's restorative power on behalf of his people. This image culminates in v. 12 when God says, "their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more." The Hebrew word for languish literally means melt with heat.<sup>2</sup> Then there is a refrain in v. 23-25 of this same concept of streams of restoration. God says he will restore their

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<sup>1</sup> Elijah's vocational stressors, subsequent breakdowns, and restoration are worthy of reflection in 1 Kings 17-19.

<sup>2</sup> "H1669 - dā'ab - Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 26 Jun, 2024.

fortunes and satisfy every weary (literally “thirsty”) soul. God promises to replenish his people who are languishing (heat-melted).<sup>3</sup>

Jeremiah’s references to streams and his use of water-related imagery enhance the reader’s understanding of God’s gracious restorative objectives. Streams are the perfect emblematic preface to the rest of chapter 31 which introduces the new covenant. In 31:31-40, Jeremiah prophecies about this new covenant that will bring future times of restoration for God’s people. Streams are also the perfect symbol to prompt us to meditate upon our lives and where they need God’s restorative grace. Where in your life are you, or someone you love, languishing amidst the heat? What might it look like for God to make you walk by brooks of water (Jer. 31:9) and refresh you?

## PRAYER

Gracious God, my Good Shepherd, make me to walk by brooks of water. Restore my soul O Lord. I look to you, and you alone, for refreshment. I long to be like a tree planted by streams of water, that does not fear when heat comes, who is flourishing in relationship with you. I long to be fruitful in my witness. Grant me strength to sustain me amidst these challenges, give me eyes to see the good, and give me the faith to look ahead with confidence and trust in your future grace. Thank you Lord for streams and for the reminder they are of your restorative power and the hope of future restoration found in Christ. It is in his name I pray. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> "H5889 - 'āyēp̄ - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 26 Jun, 2024. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5889/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

# CONFIRMATION

Streams are an emblem that represent God's sustaining and restorative grace. The passage from Jeremiah 17:8 displays the connection between streams and sustaining grace. The most succinct articulation that confirms streams as an emblem of restoration is from Psalm 126:4. The Psalmist prays, "Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the [desert]!" What a pithy prayer and a great picture of the Lord's power to restore his people's welfare spiritually, socially, physically, and in all areas of life.

There are certainly overlapping associative meanings between water emblems like streams and rain, or brooks and rivers. However, streams are different than rivers in their propensity to dry up and then flow again. It is more common to see a dry streambed than a dry riverbed. Streams are different than rain in their capacity to channel rain and snowmelt to dry places so that life is refreshed and restored. In Ancient Israel, the climate caused fluctuations between dry and fertile seasons. Flowing streams signaled times of replenishment when the land regained its vitality and fruitfulness.



## Benjamin Keach

*Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors - "Metaphors from Water"*

Keach was a Puritan Baptist Minister from England during the late 1600's.<sup>4</sup> He had a specific interest in and wrote about emblems from God's created world. When Keach likens

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<sup>4</sup> The above image is Benjamin Keach NPG D13655 © National Portrait Gallery, London by Michael Vandergucht, after J. Surmans. The image is used under the following license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>, and was cropped and resized for this document.

streams to the gracious blessings of Christ's kingdom, he confirms that streams are a symbol of God's grace in restorative blessings. Christ's kingdom come is a fulfillment of God's people's hopes for restoration.

Keach writes: "Sometimes a stream or brook is taken metaphorically in a good sense, either because of the abundance of waters, which are transferred to plenty of good things, Job 20:17; by the 'brooks of honey and butter' . . . is signified a confluence of prosperous, pleasant, and desirable things, even to full satisfaction, Psalm 36:8, 'God is said to make believers drink of the rivers (or brooks) of his pleasures,' that is, to bestow a plenty of blessed, sweet, and heavenly good upon them, which is that life and overplus . . . which Christ promised to his sheep, John 10:10. . . .

Or else the reason of [streams] being taken in a good sense is because in dry and unwatered countries, the inundation of brooks are very seasonable and profitable; Isaiah 35:6, 'In the wilderness waters shall break out, and streams in the desert;' he adds, verse 7, 'And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.' This is a metaphorical description of the blessings of Christ's kingdom, and with respect to their sweetness and abundance. . . [God's] streams are the special blessings or benefits we receive from his divine protection, which flow from his grace as rivulets from a river."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key, to Open Scripture Metaphors, in Four Books. To Which Are Prefixed Arguments to Prove the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (London: William Hill Collingridge City Press, 1858), 119.