

Out of Them Will Flow Rivers of Living Water?

You will often hear it taught that living water will flow out of each of us believers. Is this true, biblically speaking?

The reference used to teach this is:

John 7:37-38 (NIV) – ...*Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”*

John 7:37-38 (NKJV) – ...*Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “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.”*

Notice that there are two variations in these translations:

1. The way the OT “scriptures” that Jesus cited are translated varies greatly – i.e. they are very different. Why?
2. One translation says living water will flow out of “them” & the other says “his” (i.e. “him”). Why?

(1) According to the Common English Bible the original Greek literally translates as: *Floods of quick water shall flow of his womb.*¹ The renditions above are common examples of translators writing in English so that it makes sense to today’s readers and also fitting it in with their theology. Their technique has changed the meaning of what Jesus actually said. When this’s done elsewhere in the NT it leads to differences in the doctrines people live by.

IMPORTANT: There is no scripture that’s equivalent to what Jesus quoted when a search is made in our English translations of the OT. Notes in some Bible margins point to numerous verse in Isaiah², but none of them have any resemblance to John 7:38. Jesus may have quoted from an Aramaic translation which his hearers would have been familiar with. He could have been quoting from a prophetic book that’s not in our OT – there are numerous references to these books in the OT.³

(2) “Them” or “him” doesn’t alter the meaning of the sentence. It’s just the translator’s phraseology which accounts for the differences between the various English translations.

***** But there’s a more important issue here with these 2 verses *****

Check out this alternative rendering of verse 38 which appears as a footnote online:⁴

Note: Or me. “*And let anyone drink who believes in me.*” As Scripture has said, “*Out of him (or them) will flow rivers of living water.*”

Instead of spiritual water flowing out of those “who believe in me”, those “who believe in me” come and drink of my spiritual water. Now that’s entirely different.

Obviously the Greek in those verses is able to be translated this way. But how come there’s this big difference?

1 – www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%207:37-39&version=WYC

2 – e.g. Isaiah 12:3; 43:20; 44:3; 55:1

3 – The OT lists 48 prophets, however, 55 are recognised by Jewish scholars based on the Talmud and the writings of Rashi. Quite a few are referenced in the OT as either ‘books’ or ‘sayings’. The list of these and their scripture references are in a table in the document below. canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Canberra-School-For-Prophets-Lesson-18.pdf

4 – www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+7:38&version=NIV#en-NIV-26367

When verse 38 is quoted in isolation (i.e. out of textual context) the purpose of what Jesus said is lost. That's because verse 39 gives the context:

John 7:39 (NKJV) – *But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

This verse says that we will receive living water from Holy Spirit (or, we will receive Holy Spirit) which Jesus will supply when we come to him, commit ourselves to him, and enter his Kingdom.

This rendering of what Jesus said now fits in with what he said elsewhere⁵ and what we know is a reality.⁶

The following translations give this correct slant on what Jesus said in verse 38:

John 7:37-38 (WYC⁷) – *...Jesus stood, and cried, and said [saying], If any man thirsteth, come he to me, and drink. He that believeth in me, as the scripture saith, Rivers of quick water shall flow out of his womb [Floods of quick water shall flow of his womb].*

John 7:37-39 (CEB⁸) – *...Jesus stood up and shouted, “All who are thirsty should come to me! All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.”*

John 7:37-38 (DLNT⁹) – *...Jesus was standing there. And He cried-out, saying, “If anyone is thirsting, let him come to Me and drink. The one believing in Me, just as the Scripture said— Rivers of living water will flow from his belly”.*

This important point is brought out in some of the footnotes to these translations:

DLNT Note: Or, let him come to Me. And let the one believing in Me drink. Just as the Scripture said, rivers of living water will flow from His (Christ's) belly.¹⁰

CEB Note: Or, Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, just as the scriptures said, rivers of living water will flow out from within them.¹¹

CONCLUSION: Living water (the life of the Spirit) doesn't flow out of us believers. Instead, Jesus is the door to access this living water which we as believers can get from him.

IMPLICATION: You can believe what I've concluded here, which is what we know is a Kingdom reality (and one which Jesus taught), or you can believe what pulpit teachers have taught you. This choice is yours.

Laurence

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5 – John 4:10, 14 (John 20:22)

6 – “Kingdom Food” canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Kingdom-Food.pdf

7 – Wycliffe Bible

8 – Common English Bible

9 – Disciples' Literal New Testament

10 – www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%207:37-39&version=DLNT#en-DLNT-3222

11 – www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%207:37-39&version=CEB#en-CEB-26355