

Flow

ῥέω

ῥέω (*rheō*), flow, stream; ῥύσις (*rhysis*), a flowing river, stream; παραρρέω (*pararrheō*), flow past, drift away,

let slip.

CL Although words for “flow” commonly derive from words for “run”, *rheō* is a notable exception: it reflects the Indo-European root *sreu* with the specific meaning “flow” (cf. Sanskrit *sru*). Frequently this root survives in its numerous non-verbal derivatives, the most important of which is *rhysis*.

Occurring widely from the time of Homer, the word group commonly refers to the flow of a stream or river; but it can be applied to the run-off from melted snow (Herodotus), the “running” of milk and honey, equivalent to prosperity (Theocritus), or, with respect to blood, a haemorrhage (Hippocrates, Dioscorides). Homer, Hesiod, and Aeschylus apply it to a stream of glib words; Homer to darts. A city or an area may stream with men (Herodotus, Euripides, Aristophanes) or gold (Herodotus). Solid objects liquefy and “melt away” (Sophocles) – even stone (Aristotle). Hence it is not surprising that the word group takes on the meaning of “fall”, “drop off” – of hair (Homer, Hesiod, Theocritus), or ripe fruit (Polybius). An individual may be “given to” something, “inclined” to it (Isocrates, Plato): it is easy to imagine how such an idiom would develop.

OT The LXX reflects an equally wide variety of usage. The word group most often stands for Heb. *zūh* (flow, gush), especially as applied to the promised land

which flows with milk and honey (Exod. 3:8; 13:5; Lev. 20:24; Num. 14:8; Deut. 6:3; 26:9; Jos. 5:6; Jer. 11:5; Bar. 1:20; etc.) or to some discharge or haemorrhage (notably in Lev. 15). Further, water flowed from the smitten rock (Ps. 77:20; 104:41; cf. Isa. 48:21, LXX with future tense). The Heb. word group next most likely to be represented by *rheō* is *nāzal* (and synonym *rā'āp*; trickle, drip), usually in connection with the descent of precipitation at the divine command (Job 36:28; 38:30; Ps. 147:18; Prov. 3:20; cf. Job 38:25), but also with the falling of tears (Jer. 9:18) and wafting by the wind of perfume (Cant. 4:16). Joel twice uses *rheō* to translate the diversely-used Heb. verb *hālāk* with reference to the flow of water and milk from Judea's hills when the Spirit of the Lord is poured out and blessings abound (3:18 *bis*). A more ominous use of the verb is made by Zechariah, who pictures flesh decaying and eyes "melting out" of their sockets, fitting retribution for those who war against Jerusalem (14:12; Heb. *māqaq*, fester, rot). Simile is invoked to liken the disappearance of the hope of ungrateful people to the "running away" of water and the melting of hoar frost. (Wis. 16:29). Men are warned not to trust in wealth even if it should "flow in" (Ps. 62:10; Heb. *nūb*, bear fruit).

Both Philo and Josephus utilize the word group with similar diversity, the latter applying it on one occasion to the stream of memory which "runs down" through the ages, recalling the noble sacrifice of Jeconiah (*War* 6, 105).

NT The verb *rheō* occurs but once in the NT: "from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (Jn. 7:38). Some commentators run 7:37b and 7:38a into one sentence: "If any man is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes drink." In that case "his" innermost being refers to Christ, who alone provides "living" water (cf. Jn. 4:10). It is more likely correct to see a sentence division at the end of 7:37, making the believer the one from whose being the water (= Spirit) flows. The believer is thus viewed as a channel for the outflowing of the Spirit to others (cp. 15:26 f.).

The 3 NT occurrences of *rhysis* are all in connection with "flow of blood" = haemorrhage (Mk. 5:25 = Lk. 8:43 f.), endured by one woman for twelve years.

([F. F. Bruce] The compound *pararrheō*, lit. "flow past", is used figuratively in Heb. 2:1 with reference to "what we have heard" (i.e. the gospel), "lest we drift away from it" (RSV; cf. RV, NEB). AV, "lest . . . we should let them slip", follows another sense of the vb., e.g. of letting a ring slip off one's finger [Plut., *Amatorius* 754a].)

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Arndt, 627, 742; W. K. Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, 1882, 15 f.; Liddell-Scott, 1322 f., 1568; Moulton-Milligan, 489, 563.