

THE RIVER DRAGON: ITS MEANING IN SCRIPTURE*

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It long has been known that all cosmic sources of waters were conceived, in ancient Near Eastern mythological imagery, as dragons.¹ Given this type of personification of water bodies in nature, it is easy to understand how ancient man looked upon winding rivers as twisting serpent-monsters.² Overflowing flood waters, stretching out from a raging river torrent, added a further confirming touch to the imagery. Hence, the deluge monster, referred to in cuneiform literature as Abūbu, is conceived not merely as a serpent, but as a dragon possessing wings.³ Can this not be the background for the imagery found in Isaiah 8:7, 8? “The king of Assyria and all his glory” are likened to an overflowing flood of the (Euphrates) river which “will sweep on into Judah . . . reaching even to the neck.” This river that “will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks,” seemingly is also a river with “outspread wings.” If the above imagery is accepted, that which is being described is not simply an upcoming confrontation between Assyria and Judah, but a cosmic confrontation which will take place between the dragon and Immanuel (vs.8), who is supernaturally described in 9:6, as the future ruler of Judah.⁴