48995 - What Is al-Kawthar?

the question

What is al-Kawthar? Is it only for the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)?

Summary of answer

Al-Kawthar has two meanings:
1- It is a river in Paradise which Allah has given to His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him),
2- It is a great cistern – a tank for holding water – which will be set up in the place of gathering on the Day of Resurrection, to which the ummah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) will come.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What is al-Kawthar?

The word kawthar in Arabic refers to great abundance.

In Islamic terminology, al-Kawthar has two meanings:

- It is a river in Paradise which Allah has given to His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). This meaning is what is meant in the verse where Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, We have granted you (O Muhammad) Al-Kawthar (a river in Paradise).” [Al-Kawthar 108:1]

This is how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) interpreted it. It was narrated

by Muslim in his Sahih (607) that Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Whilst we were with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he dozed off then he raised his head and he was smiling. We said, “Why are you smiling, O Messenger of Allah?” He said: “A surah has been revealed to me.” And he recited (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, We have granted you (O Muhammad) Al-Kawthar (a river in Paradise)…” [Al-Kawthar 108:1] to the end of the surah. Then he said: “Do you know what al-Kawthar is?” We said: Allah and His Messenger know best.” He said: “It is a river that my Lord has promised to me in which there is much goodness. And it is a cistern to which my ummah will come on the Day of Resurrection .”

Al-Tirmidhi (3284) narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Al-Kawthar is a river in Paradise. Its banks are made of gold and its bed is of pearls and rubies…” Al-Tirmidhi said: “It is hasan sahih.” It was classed as sahih by al-Albani in Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 3/135.

- It is a great cistern – a tank for holding water – which will be set up in the place of gathering on the Day of Resurrection, to which the ummah of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) will come.

The water of this cistern will come from the river of al-Kawthar which is in Paradise, hence it is called the Cistern of al-Kawthar. The evidence for that is the hadith narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (4255) from Abu Dharr, that “into the Cistern will flow two pipes from Paradise.” The apparent meaning of this hadith is that the Cistern will be next to Paradise so that the water from the river that is inside Paradise will be able to flow into it, as Ibn Hajar said in al-Fath 11/466. And Allah knows best.

Is al-Kawthar only for Prophet Muhammad?

But is al-Kawthar only for the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to the exclusion of other prophets, or not?

- With regard to the river of al-Kawthar from which water will flow into the Cistern, there is no report of any other prophet having anything like it, apart from our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Allah states that He has blessed him with it in Surat al-Kawthar, so it is likely that this is only for our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and not for any other prophet.
- With regard to the Cistern of al-Kawthar, it is well known among the scholars that it is only for our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Among those who stated this was al-Qurtubi in al-Mufahhim.

But al-Tirmidhi (2367) narrated that Samurah said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Every Prophet will have a cistern and they will be looking to see who has the largest number of followers coming to him, and I hope that I will have the largest number.” All the isnads of this hadith are weak , but some of the scholars ruled that it is acceptable because it has so many isnads, as al-Albani said in al-Sahihah, 1589. Some of them ruled that it is weak (da’if). Even if this hadith cannot be proven, it is not unlikely that the Cistern will also be only for our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to the exclusion of others. And Allah knows best.

Characteristics of al-Kawthar

The characteristics of the river that is in Paradise and the Cistern that will be set up in the place of gathering were narrated in the sahih Sunnah.

The characteristics of the river of al-Kawthar that will be in Paradise include the following:

Al-Bukhari narrated in his Sahih from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whilst I was walking in Paradise, I saw a river whose banks were domes of hollow pearls.” I said, “What is this, O Jibril?” He said: “This is al-Kawthar which your Lord has given to you.” The angel struck it with his hand and its mud or its perfume was of the most fragrant (or pure) musk.

In al-Musnad (12084) it was narrated from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “I have been given al-Kawthar, and it is a river that flows on the face of the earth. Its banks are domes of pearls and it is not covered. I struck its dust with my hand and its dust was the most fragrant (or pure) musk, and its pebbles were pearls.” Classed as sahih by al-Albani in al-Sahihah, 2513.

According to another report narrated in al-Musnad (12827) also from Anas, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was asked about al-Kawthar and he said: “That is a river which Allah has given to me, in Paradise. It is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey, and in it are birds whose necks are like the necks of camels.” ‘Umar said: “Those are soft birds.” The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Eating them is even softer, O ‘Umar.” Classed as sahih by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Targhib wa’l-Tarhib, 3740.

Features of al-Hawd

With regard to the features of the Cistern that will be in the place of gathering, they include the following:

Al-Bukhari (6093) and Muslim (4244) narrated that ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Amr said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “My Cistern is (as big as) the distance of a month’s (journey). Its length and width are equal and its water is whiter than milk and its scent is better than musk. Its drinking vessels are like the stars of the sky and whoever drinks from it will never thirst again.”

In Sahih Muslim (4261) it is narrated from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “In it can be seen vessels of gold and silver whose number is as the stars of the sky.” According to another report, “More than the number of stars in the sky.”

It is also narrated in Sahih Muslim (4256) from Thawban (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was asked about its drink and he said: “It is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey. Two pipes feed into it from Paradise, one of gold and the other of silver.”

Authenticity of Hadiths about al-Hawd

There is no doubt among the scholars that the hadiths about the Cistern reach the level of being mutawatir (i.e., narrated by so many people from so many people that it is inconceivable that they could all agree upon a lie). It was narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) by more than fifty of his Companions.

Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar listed the names of the Companions who narrated these hadiths in al-Fath (11/468). And al-Qurtubi said in al-Mufahhim Sharh Sahih Muslim: “Every Muslim has to understand and believe that Allah has singled out His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to be given the Cistern, the name and features of which and its drink are mentioned in the well known sahih hadiths which, when taken together, constitute definitive knowledge.

Location of al-Hawd

With regard to where the Cistern will be located in the land of gathering, the scholars differed concerning this matter. Some said that it will be after the Siraat (bridge across Hell). Others said that it will be before the Sirat. This is the view of the majority and is more likely to be correct – and Allah knows best – because some of those who come to it will be taken to Hell, and if it were after the Sirat they would not be able to reach it because they would already have fallen into Hell – we seek refuge with Allah.

We must also draw attention to a very important and serious matter which is that not everyone who belongs to the ummah of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) will attain the honour of drinking from the Cistern of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The hadiths clearly state that there are some people among this ummah who will be driven back harshly from the Cistern – we ask Allah to keep us safe from that.

Who will drink and will not drink from al-Kawthar?

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has answered this question clearly in such

a way that no one has any excuse. Muslim narrated in his Sahih (367) from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came to the graveyard and said: “Peace be upon you, O habitation of believing people. We will join you soon, if Allah wills. Would that we had seen our brothers.” They said, “Are we not your brothers, O Messenger of Allah?” He said: “You are my companions. Our brothers are those who have not yet come.” They said: “How will you recognize those among your ummah who have not yet come, O Messenger of Allah?” He said: “If a man has a horse with a white blaze and white feet among horses that are all black, don’t you think that he will recognize his horse?” They said: “Of course, O Messenger of Allah.” He said: “They will come with white foreheads and white hands and feet because of wudu’. I will have reached the Cistern ahead of them and men will be driven away from my Cistern as stray camels are driven away. (I will say), ‘Let them come,’ and it will said to me, ‘They changed after you were gone,’ so I will say, ‘Away with them!’”

In al-Bukhari (6528) and Muslim (4243) it is narrated that Abu Hazim said: I heard Sahl say: I heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: “I will reach the Cistern ahead of you. Whoever comes to it will drink and whoever drinks from it will never thirst again. Some people will come to me whom I will recognize and they will recognize me, but then a barrier will be placed between me and them.”

Abu Hazim said: al-Nu'man ibn Abi ‘Ayyaash heard me narrating this hadith and said: “Is that how you heard Sahl say it?” I said, “Yes.” He said: “I bear witness that I heard Abu Sa’id al-Khudri add: and he [meaning the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)] said: ‘They are from me.” And it will be said; “You do not know what they did after you were gone.” And I will say, “Away with those who changed after I was gone!”’”

It was narrated by al-Bukhari (2194) and Muslim (4257) from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “By the One in Whose hand is my soul, I will drive men away from my Cistern as strange camels are driven away from a cistern.”

Al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Our scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) said: Everyone who apostatizes from the religion of Allah or who introduces innovations with which Allah is not pleased and did not give permission for is one of those who will be driven away from the Cistern. Those who will be most forcibly driven away will be those who differed from the majority of Muslims and split from them, such as the Kharijis and Rafidis of all stripes, and the Mu’tazilis and anyone who followed their ways. The same applies to the evildoers and oppressors who tried to extinguish the truth and kill its followers and humiliate them, and those who openly committed major sins and took the matter of sin lightly, and all those who followed deviant whims and desires and innovation.” (Al-Tadhkirah by al-Qurtubi, 306)

So we must strive to follow the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and not go against him in any way, in the hope that Allah will honour us by allowing us to drink from this blessed Cistern . Otherwise what regret can be greater than the regret of the one who is pushed away from before the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and suffers unbearable thirst but is not allowed to drink that cool water, then his loss is further compounded by the prayer of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that he be driven far away? We seek refuge with Allah. Imagine this torment – what if you were actually to experience it?

We ask Allah to bless us and our Muslim brothers will guidance to follow the Sunnah and to avoid bid’ah (innovation) and sin. Amin. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

References:

1. Al-Qiyamah al-Kubra by Shaykh ‘Umar al-Ashqar, 257-262.
2. Al-Jannah wa’l-Nar by Shaykh ‘Umar al-Ashqar, 166, 167.
3. Fath al-Bari by al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar, 11/466.

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