



Connexions

Faith & Creation

10 Bible Studies

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Faith and Creation – 10 Bible Study Sessions

Written & compiled
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'God writes the Gospel
not in the Bible alone

but also on the trees
and in the flowers
clouds and stars.'

Martin Luther

Study Two - Ocean



We often fail to remember that there are no living things in this world that can survive without water, and the oceans are this world's vast storage cistern.

Ninety-seven percent of the Earth's water is contained within the oceans, but is of course much too salty to drink or be used for irrigating crops. But evaporation is taking place constantly which takes this brackish water, leaves behind the salt, and forms clouds that are blown by the wind and deposited as rainwater onto farmland, irrigating fields and sustaining human life.

There is of course immense power in the ocean, a power that can be unleashed to devastating effect when the earth beneath moves and raises a tsunami tidal wave. Yet this natural source of power can also be harnessed to generate power through manipulation of tidal forces.

In Biblical times the People of Israel knew well that water was both powerful and also a valuable commodity. Imagine if you can their wanderings through the wilderness for forty years, and their inevitable dependence upon God to provide for their needs – how far could they have walked without water?

Today our knowledge of science can sometimes blind us to the spiritual, and we fail to see God's hand in the natural laws that govern this world. J Wallace Hamilton, writing in 'Who Goes there? What and where is God?' says *'An amazing thing has happened in our way of thinking. In a world that could not for one moment exist without the activity of God, we have conditioned our minds to a way of thinking that leaves no room for him. So many of our wants are provided by what seem to be natural and impersonal forces that we have lost sight of the great provider in the midst of providence... if you ask a child where milk comes from, he won't think of saying "From a cow." He will say "From a container."'*

Early Christian monks in Ireland had no such problems and were still well connected to the God who provided for all their needs. They were quite taken with stories of the Desert Fathers (who found a spiritual solitude in often remote and harsh countryside) and looked for a similar wilderness where they could give themselves over to God. A lack of real desert did not put them off. Certain boggy areas were set aside for prayer (some place names still have the element *disert* in them), and they turned to the one wilderness that they had in abundance – the Atlantic Ocean – and set off in flimsy leather and wickerwork boats in search of 'the desert in the ocean'

They were looking for land where they could settle; land which could supply them with water and food; land where they could be alone with their God, and hundreds of monks set out on the potentially perilous journey across the ocean trusting not in navigational skills but God to keep them safe.

The provision of water was and is important, but the Bible deals not only with the physical but also with the spiritual condition of mankind, and when we turn to the pages of the New Testament we find deeper spiritual symbolism in the use of the word 'water'

¹³ Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

John 14

Water might have wonderful physical properties, but spiritually so does the Water of Life that comes to us through Jesus Christ. Just as we cannot live without the refreshing qualities of water, so our spiritual lives are dead if not washed, cleansed and refreshed by God. Water is such a wonderful picture of how this process takes place. To some, this cleansing is a gradual process, as the ocean breaks softly upon the shore. To others it is as if a tsunami had entered their lives, washing away all the debris in a moment of time.

Are you feeling a little more excited about water? Can you stand at the ocean's edge and begin to appreciate the awesome power that lies in front of you, the wonderful way in which the Creator distributes water throughout the world?

Can you then make the jump and begin to look at water with spiritual eyes? We rely on rain to sustain our crops as they grow, bringing goodness to every part of a plant or tree; providing us with the means to quench our thirst, clean and refresh our

bodies and to be literally at the very centre of all that we are. Without water we are physically dead within such a short space of time.

For lives that are dried up spiritually, thirsty for the experience of God's presence in their lives, He comes like a gentle rain and entering in like sap flowing upward in a tree feeds heart, mind and soul. Those who feel unclean are washed and purified, the tired refreshed and all who open themselves in such a way will know the truth of Jesus' words in their lives.

'... The water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

Pause for thought

'If I could live in a tiny dwelling on a rock in the ocean, surrounded by the waves of the sea and cut off from the sight and sound of everything else, I would still not be free of the cares of this passing world, or from the fear that somehow the love of money might still come and snatch me away.'

Cuthbert of Lindesfarne (d.687)

Discussion:

- 1) Cuthbert raises an interesting question. We have talked about the cleansing properties of water, of the power contained within the ocean which echoes the awesome power of God the Creator. Does the sound and sight of the surf breaking loudly upon the shore simply remind us of all that separates us from God or are we comfortable with the picture? People have literally been washed away by an incoming tide. Like Cuthbert is there a measure of fear that wherever we are in our lives temptation could 'snatch us away'
- 2) There is a strange dichotomy between the gentlest raindrop and the violence of a tsunami, and yet we also see in the nature of God the gentle love of a Father and the awesome force of the Creator of this universe. Can you grasp that picture? What does it tell you about God?
- 3) *'We have lost sight of the great provider in the midst of providence...'* How easy is it to lose track of God's provision in a world where most things are handed to us on a plate?