

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #30:

WATER: GOD'S DIVIDING LINE

By John Temples

It is perhaps the most amazing substance on earth, yet the most common. What is it? Water. To appreciate God's creative genius, consider water--H₂O.

SOME AMAZING PROPERTIES OF WATER

It is completely harmless and inert; yet its two components are hydrogen and oxygen, two of the most volatile gases on earth. The Hindenburg disaster was caused by a spark igniting the hydrogen in the balloon.

Water is the universal solvent. It dissolves more things more easily than any other substance. It can dissolve nutrients and carry them across cell walls into every part of your body. That's why your body is 60% water. Blood, sweat, and tears--they're all water!

*Water is the universal solvent, yet it has high surface tension--*all kinds of things (sticks, leaves, etc.) can float on it. High surface tension is why some insects can literally "walk on water." And it has tremendous bonding qualities. It can form drops and puddles.

Water expands as it freezes. This unique quality of water is the reason ice floats. If water did not have this property, lakes would freeze and the ice would sink to the bottom. Eventually, the whole lake would freeze from the bottom up, killing all life in the lake.

Water has a high specific heat. In fact, it has the highest heat capacity of all liquids. This simply means it takes a lot of heat to warm up water. (The old saying "a watched pot never boils" is true!) Water also loses its heat slowly. That's why temperature extremes in coastal areas are moderated. The oceans, or any large bodies of water, act as giant heat sinks or regulators.

The ratio of water to land on earth is 70/30. That's exactly the right ratio to keep the earth's temperature within the range we need to live.

The chemical properties of water are truly amazing, but it is marvelous for another reason: It is...

GOD'S DIVIDING LINE

Throughout history, whenever God has wanted to mark a distinction between one state of being and another, or between one relationship and another, He has used WATER.

Consider the Flood: it was the dividing line between two completely different worlds or states of existence. It marked the end of the old, sin-saturated world and the beginning of a new, clean world to be repopulated by Noah and his descendants. Peter spoke of this in 2 Peter 3:5-7--"...by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

Water was also a symbol of transition in the history of the nation of Israel. God's people Israel were slaves in Egypt for many generations. But one day, they left Egypt by the power of God. They left the world of slavery and entered a world of freedom.

Was there a single point in time which marked that great transition? Yes, the crossing of the Red Sea. Until they crossed that sea, they were still in Egyptian territory, still under Pharaoh's jurisdiction. They were not truly free--not truly under Moses' control--until they crossed the Red Sea. You might even say they were "baptized" into Moses in the Red Sea. That's exactly the way Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2--"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea. All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

Forty years later, there was another momentous transition. They left the wilderness and came into the Promised Land. And what event marked that transition? The crossing of the water of the Jordan River: “So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan” (Joshua 3:14-17).

This was a unique day in history, and God marked it by giving the people a sign involving water that they would never forget.

After the Israelites came into Canaan, God continued to use water as a line of demarcation. In front of the tabernacle was a large basin of water, called a laver (Exodus 40:7ff). Every time a priest went into the tabernacle to do his service, he ceremonially washed in this basin. They could not serve in the tabernacle until they had washed. Exodus 40:30-32 says, “He set the laver between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, and put water there for washing; and Moses, Aaron, and his sons washed their hands and their feet with water from it. When they went into the tabernacle of meeting, and when they came near the altar, they washed, as the Lord had commanded Moses.” When Aaron and his sons were consecrated as priests, they had to wash their whole body and clothes in water (Numbers 8:7). Water was the dividing line between unconsecrated and consecrated, between un-commissioned and commissioned.

Is it any wonder, then, that when God came to give man the New Testament, and when He came to choose a symbol of transition from one’s old life to his new life in Christ, He chose *water*?

The process of becoming a Christian involves hearing the gospel, believing it, repenting of sins, confessing Christ, and being baptized (immersed) in water. When during this chain of events does a person actually make the transition from being a sinner to being a Christian? We do not have to wonder, because God has done what He always did throughout history: He used WATER as a marker or symbol of the transition. We believe “unto” salvation--we repent and confess “unto” salvation--but it is the act of baptism that puts us “into” Christ. Galatians 3:26-27--“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” No wonder the New Testament stresses baptism so much, and no surprise that every person in the record of the book of Acts who became a Christian was baptized immediately.

And God is so amazing and so creative that He was able to incorporate into baptism all the metaphorical symbolism of the dividing lines of the past. Consider:

- Through the Flood, Noah left behind the old world filled with sin and was delivered to the new world cleansed from sin. That is exactly what you and I do in baptism. Peter talked about “...the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:20-21).
- When did the Israelites leave Pharaoh’s jurisdiction and come into the custody of Moses, God’s servant? When they crossed the Red Sea. When do you and I leave the state of slavery in Satan’s kingdom and come into freedom and the custody of Jesus? When we “cross the Red Sea” of Christ’s blood.
- And when do we cross that “sea”? When we die to our old selves and symbolically come into contact with the blood of Christ in baptism. Romans 6:3-4--“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

- When did we leave the spiritual wilderness that is the world and enter into the Promised Land of the church? At our baptism.
- And remember, the Old Testament priests had to wash at the laver before they could enter the tabernacle and do the service of God. Before they washed, they were unfit for service; after they washed, they could serve. Before you and I were washed in baptism, we were unfit for God's service; but through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, we were cleansed and made fit to serve. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

How marvelous is the wisdom of God, and His ways past finding out! The process of becoming a Christian is a spiritual one, and therefore invisible. We might therefore not be sure of its reality and accomplishment. But God gave us a visible marker. He used one of the most amazing substances in His creation to mark the transition from sinner to saint.

Truly, water is God's "dividing line":

- Between the old world and the new;
- Between slavery and freedom;
- Between the wilderness and the Promised Land;
- Between the state of being unfit to serve God and being fit for His use;
- Between being in a lost state and a saved state;
- Between being outside the church and being in it.

"And now, why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). "Let us draw near with a true heart

in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:21-22). --John Temples