



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 015 Biblical Symbols 1: Water

Study Author: Michael Button

Read John 4:9-14 and John 7:37-39

The Bible contains many symbols, most often to illustrate spiritual truths. In this study we shall be looking at the symbol of WATER.

1. God's blessings. Read Ezek 47:1-9. In dry lands, in particular (which included Israel at certain times of the year), water was seen as a blessing from God. It is not hard to see how water came to symbolise God's blessing in general. Can you discern what blessings are symbolised in Ezekiel's vision of water flowing from the Temple, according to verse 9?

2. Water for Life. Life cannot exist without water, so it is a fitting symbol of God's provision of Eternal Life. Where, or in whom, is that provision to be found (see John 4:14)? To whom will it be given, and at what cost, according to Rev 22:17?

3. The Holy Spirit. On the last day of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, it was customary for the Priest to collect some water from the Pool of Siloam, in Jerusalem, and pour it on the altar in the Temple. What did Jesus call out on one of those occasions and to what was He referring, according to John (John 7:37-39)?*

4. Cleansing. In the Law of Moses (the Old Testament Laws God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai) there are numerous instructions about washing with water (e.g. Exod 29:4 – consecration of priests; Num 8:7 – appointment of Levites; Lev 11:24 – after contact with the carcass of an 'unclean' creature). Before a priest could enter the Holy parts of the Temple, he was required to wash his hands and feet at a laver (basin) of water provided for that purpose (Exod 30:18-21). A worshipper could not draw close to a pure, holy God without being clean. What do you think this tells us about being "clean" from sin? Can you see any connection with baptism (see Acts 22:16 and 1 Pet 3:21).

To think about: Compare Jeremiah 2:13 with Psalm 42:1. Where do you stand between longing for the Lord and being satisfied with your own endeavours ("cisterns")?

To dig deeper:

1. Follow the subject of *water* with the aid of a concordance and see if the context of each reference has any symbolic significance. (Think what the significance might be before checking in a commentary.)
2. See what commentators suggest might have been the purpose of the water pouring ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles.

* "Living water" means water that is flowing and thereby pure, rather than static and liable to become stagnant.